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FOLLY MORRISON.

A Nobel.

BY
FRANK BARRETT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.



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FOLLY MORRISON.

CHAPTER I.

SEPARATION.

RICHARD VANE turned his eyes from the agonised girl, stretched upon the bed beside her unconscious father, to her husband, standing with Sir Andrew passive and horror-stricken. ‘Have you anything to say?’ he asked in a low voice.

‘What *can* I say?’ Roland replied in a distressed undertone.

Vane knew what he should have said and done had he been in Roland’s place. He should have thrown himself by Folly’s side, and, pleading his own innocence, have offered such comfort as compassion suggested. He

should have called upon her to fulfil the functions she had sacredly undertaken to perform regardless of the threatened consequences to himself. But he saw no sign in Roland's face of any such feelings as stirred his own heart; it only expressed horror and distress at the sight that met his eyes.

To press upon him as a duty that which should be the spontaneous outgrowth of love, would serve, Vane saw, simply to extend the terrible scene, to provoke Folly to still greater excitement, and might possibly lead only to that result which Folly had had in contemplation.

'I fear I can say nothing that will do any good,' Roland added.

'Nothing?' asked Vane, appealing with a last hope.

'Well, I want to do whatever is right, you know. What shall I say?'

'Nothing,' he answered, in another and conclusive tone.

Then he opened the door noiselessly, motioning the father and son to be gone, and, remaining in the room himself, he as silently closed it when they had passed out. Shaken and enfeebled, Sir Andrew had scarcely strength to totter down the stairs,

nor was Roland in a condition to give great assistance. At the foot of the stairs he paused, leaning upon the banister for support.

‘You are faint, sir; come into the dining-room and let me get you a little brandy.’

‘No, no, my boy; let us get away from this horrible place as quickly as possible.’

There was no resentment in his tone now. Folly had effected a strange and speedy reconciliation.

Le géant was still waiting with the ponies for orders where Roland had left him.

‘Let us drive to the nearest hotel,’ said Sir Andrew, taking his seat in the phaeton.

Roland took the reins in his hand; *le géant* ran down to the gate; the ponies walked down the drive and out into the road; and so the new proprietor gave up possession of Thorn Lodge, leaving behind him his bride, his home, and his hopes.

On the road it occurred to him that the carriage he sat in was not his to use. He had given it to his wife, and had no right to it now that he had separated from her. That reflection brought home to him his desolation and his dependency upon Sir Andrew.

Father and son spoke never a word as they drove along, and the curiosity of the quick-

witted servant in the seat behind, excited by the ghastly pallor of the two gentlemen as they came from the house, remained ungratified.

At the hotel, Sir Andrew, looking around him and seeing no stabling accommodation, said:

‘Where shall you send the boy with the trap, Roland?’

‘Back to my wife; it is her property.’

Sir Andrew bowed and turned to the hotel. At the door he called Roland, who was instructing *le géant*.

‘Before you send the boy away, I want to speak to you,’ he said.

Roland accompanied his father into the private room to which they were conducted by the waiter. When they were alone, Sir Andrew said:

‘It will be necessary to do something for these unhappy people, and I have my cheque-book with me.’ Sir Andrew had not expected to win the victory without proper arms, and had come prepared for the worst contingencies that entered his imagination. ‘If you like to send a blank cheque by the boy, and so conclude this dreadful affair at once——’

‘It is impossible. We must find some more delicate way than that, sir.’

‘More delicate than sending a cheque to

be filled at their discretion!’ exclaimed Sir Andrew, in gentle astonishment.

‘Dick must advise us—that is, if you wish Folly to accept your offer.’

‘Of course I do. You know these persons better than I, and understand their peculiar ideas; but still, I should have thought a little note with the cheque sent by the boy——’ said the baronet, persuasively.

‘No, sir; it would be sent back to us in a hundred fragments, and so all hope of serving them would be lost.’

‘Well!— —’

Sir Andrew turned aside, raising his eyebrows and nodding his head slowly, as if the people in this world were all inscrutably perverse. It seemed to him such an admirable way of getting over the difficulty, that he could not understand how any one should fail to appreciate it—why Folly should not accept the cheque, and why Roland should not, at any rate, ‘send it by the boy.’

Roland went out and finished giving his instructions to *le géant*, and then he watched the smart little carriage as it drove away until it was lost in the mist that came before his eyes as he thought of all the happy projects that filled his mind when he bought

it but a few days ago. He envied the liveried servant who would see Folly so soon, would hear her voice, who might one day sit in his seat by her side, watching the bright colour rise in her cheeks, the excitement sparkle in her beautiful eyes, as she drove the ponies he had bought for her.

‘The boy is gone, I suppose?’ said the baronet, mournfully, when his son joined him again. Roland nodded. His heart was full. Sir Andrew sank with a sigh into a chair.

Hotel chairs are always uncomfortable to a man who has a home and a lounge of his own; this one was not an exception to the rule: it squeezed his arms up and made the contents of his pockets an annoyance, in the end obliging him to remove them to the table. Amongst the trifles was his cheque-book—now a useless bauble. Laying it down, he said in a tone of sorrow, shaking his head as over a great error:

‘If we had but sent it by the boy.’

Roland made no reply. Resting his head on one hand, he looked ruefully out into the road, and, wrapped in thought, made no movement when the waiter entered, bringing the chops and sherry ordered by the baronet.

The young fellow was not undertaking a

higher and better life on the spur of the moment, like a villain that can't be killed out of the way in the last act. He had been manly and unselfish by fits and starts already, and the fits lasted no longer than fits do in strong natures. But the truth was dawning upon him—the lesson was entering deep into his mind; he was altering, as Nature alters, by infinitesimal degrees, that begin unnoticeably.

‘The chops are on the table, Roland,’ said Sir Andrew, adjusting the knives. He looked across the room to where his son sat with his face to the window, and saw him steal a handkerchief from his pocket to his face.

‘You’ll have a bit of something, won’t you, my dear boy?’ asked the baronet, his heart melting and his own eyes filling at the sight of his son’s distress.

‘All right, dad—in half a minute,’ answered Roland, in a loud, husky tone, intended to be cheerful, sneaking the handkerchief behind him as he turned with his head down towards the table.

The baronet of course did not see him—he was too busy with the table; nevertheless Roland knew why his father picked out the best chop for him.

‘We can catch the 3.30 from Ludgate, I

think,' the baronet said soon after. 'Will that do for you, my boy?'

'Yes, if you'll have me, dad. I've no home now.'

'Don't talk like that, Roley. There's the home where you have been happy in the old times, and where we shall be happy together again.'

That seemed impossible to Roland.

'Come, let us look at things as they are, and we shall find they are not so terrible after all. I've been setting them all down in my mind this last half hour, while you have been looking at the traffic—wonderful spectacle, London traffic, it always interests me—I've tabulated it, as it were, in my mind. Now, first of all, there's poor John Morrison. He is the most to be commiserated of any man I ever knew, and how deeply sorry for him I am Heaven only knows. But then we are not entirely to blame. Because we are the administrators of justice we mustn't afflict ourselves with every accidental misdirection it takes. I remember this poor John Morrison well and all the particulars of his case. I have a remarkable head for facts. He was a labourer on one of our farms, I don't remember which, or else he rented a

little bit of land for himself, I am not certain about that. I believe he married one of the servants from the hall and received a good deal of kindness at one time and another, for which he ought to have been grateful. If it wasn't he it was Noakes; but that doesn't matter. But I remember the case of the hare very well, because it was in the middle of August, and a fearfully hot month it was, too. I recall the morning as clearly as possible—let me see though, it is that man Roberts who was taken with the pheasants I am thinking about, and not this poor fellow Morrison: however that signifies but little, the fact remains that the month was very hot. I recollect Morrison frightening me out of my wits by his violence in the library. He swore the hare was lying dead in the middle of the road when he picked it up, and my man Ledger swore he saw him take it with a wire. Ah, and the men were bad friends, and Morrison swore the charge was false and got up by Ledger from spite. And very likely it was; but how was I to know that? However, Ledger shall suffer for it. He keeps the Aveling Arms public-house. Remind me, my boy, to put a mark against his licence, damn him!

Roland took no notice; he ate his chop mechanically, but his thoughts were away with his wife.

‘And I consider it extremely hard that we who administer justice gratuitously, and put ourselves occasionally to extreme inconvenience, should be considered responsible for errors committed. Try the sherry, my dear boy.’

Roland drank in obedience to his father’s wish.

‘Not that I wish to avoid making what atonement lies in my power. We will do more than is simply just in this matter, for indeed I pity the poor fellow and that poor girl.’

Roland rose from his seat and went to the window again, his face convulsed, and the tears oozing from his eyes. His body shook as he strove to suppress the rising sobs.

Sir Andrew pushed away his chair, rose, came to the window, and putting his arm about his son’s neck, said :

‘Come, come, Roley, boy. Take heart. You do not sorrow alone; my heart aches with yours.’

Roland pressed his father’s soft hand, and wiped the tears away resolutely.

‘I will wash my face—stay here, dad. I will return before the time to start,’ he said.

Sir Andrew sat down when Roland left the room, and for five minutes felt as wretched as a selfish man can feel; then the thought that he should have his son now always with him came as a gleam of sunlight in winter to warm his heart. Another glass of sherry, with a biscuit, still further revived his spirits, and once more he turned to tackle the subject in a business, matter-of-fact way.

That he was very hardly and unjustly served was indisputable; but still the punishment was not so terrible as it might have been. It would be impossible, of course, for Roland to marry again; but then he was separated from dangerous connexions. Thus, though there was a loss in one respect, there was a gain in another. Roland would settle down to a country life, and take readily to his duties, nothing preventing him from making good acquaintances and friends. It would be extremely pleasant to Sir Andrew to have him always about the hall, instead of living at a distance and in some sort estranged, as must inevitably have been the case had he married in an ordinary way

and set up a *ménage* of his own. Of course his marriage would have to be concealed, and there was no reason on earth why it should not be. A lawyer would settle all that, if Richard Vane could not or would not. It only required a judicious use of the cheque-book. Folly's feelings of revenge were satisfied. 'But,' thought Sir Andrew, 'how much better it would have been had all further animosity been laid by that very simple means I proposed.' He knew that there was nothing so efficacious in the world for stifling enmity as a properly timed cheque; and gratitude, he considered, would have restrained Folly from active hostility. As it was, she might come to the hall and annoy her husband, and so make it difficult to prevent unpleasant rumours from getting abroad. He hoped, with some confidence, that even that possibility might be averted. On the whole, he had only one great and lasting source of regret, and that was summed up in the expression with which he closed his reflections and returned his cheque-book to his pocket—'If we had only sent it by the boy!'

But the difficulty was not so easily to be

overcome. Sir Andrew in calculating the consequences that might befall, left out of his consideration the fact that a livelier brain than his had been occupied on the same subject.

When he came down to breakfast after a night's refreshing repose, and took up that highly respectable and well-circulated paper, the *Times*, his eye, running down the first column, came to this announcement:—

‘Aveling—Morrison.—On the 28th, at St. —, Brompton, Roland Aveling, son of Sir Andrew Aveling, Bart., of Aveling Hall, Surrey, to Folly, daughter of John Morrison, of Sandy Lane, Mayford, Surrey.’

‘Great Heavens!’ he cried, dropping the paper. ‘Why, all the country will know it. There’s not a decent house in Sandy Lane. How dare they print it? It comes within the law of libel. I’ll punish them for it. Thank the Lord, every one doesn’t know Sandy Lane nor Folly!’

But even this small consolation was destroyed when, seeking to find forgetfulness of the published disgrace in the morning’s news, he opened the *Times* and looked at the leader page. There, filling the next column to the first leader, spaced out to catch the eye, was

the advertisement of his daughter-in-law's performance. Commencing at the top of the column, it ran thus :—

‘ FOLLY (Mrs. Roland Aveling) as AN-
DROMEDA.

FOLLY (Mrs. Roland Aveling) at the
LEVITY to-night.

FOLLY (Mrs. Roland Aveling) in all her
FAVOURITE DANCES.

And so on to the foot of the page.



CHAPTER II.

RICHARD VANE UNDERTAKES A NEW TASK.

ROLLY raised her head as Richard Vane turned the handle of the door after the departure of Roland and Sir Andrew.

‘Why don’t you go also?’ she asked, pushing back her hair, which had fallen upon her moist brow.

‘I will go when I am not wanted.’

‘I want you no longer. It is all done. You have seen all,’ she answered.

‘I think I can be of service here,’ Vane answered, approaching the bed on which John Morrison lay in supine unconsciousness.

He turned back the coverlet.

‘What do you want, sir?’ asked the attendant, coming forward, uneasily.

Vane did not reply immediately. He looked at the apparatus which confined John Morrison, and examined the straps he had seen the attendant tighten.

‘These straps are unnecessarily tight,’ he said.

‘No they ain’t, sir; it wouldn’t do to let him slip himself out when he’s in one of his fits.’

Vane answered by unbuckling the straps and loosening the ligature considerably.

‘How do you suppose your patient is to get repose tortured with straps that cut into his poor body as these do?’

‘Lunatics never do repose; it ain’t natural. You’ll allow me to know my own business, I suppose?’

‘If it is your business to lessen the sufferings of a patient I will allow nothing of the kind,’ replied Vane, loosening strap after strap with an angry frown at each.

‘Look here, miss, am I engaged here or not?’ the attendant asked.

Folly took no notice. She was following Vane’s movements with breathless interest.

‘Well, all I say is, that if this gent is to interfere with my affairs, and loosen them straps all round like that, *I* won’t be answerable for the consequences.’

‘I will,’ said Vane, coolly.

‘You ain’t going to undo his hands, are you?’

‘Don’t be a fool. Sit down and hold your tongue, if you cannot make yourself useful,’ said Vane.

‘Send him away, the wretch!’ said Folly, passing her hand over the ridges made in her father’s emaciated arms. ‘It is shameful to fasten the straps like that. Send him away! I’ll do all that you tell me.’

‘I don’t want to do anything harsh, sir. The straps may have been a little tightish—all of us is liable to accidents,’ the young man said in a deprecatory voice, seeing that he had nothing to hope for from Folly,

‘There, that is better,’ Vane said, looking at the old man, to the attendant.

‘It’s more comfortable like,’ said the attendant.

‘Send him away!’ said Folly, savagely. ‘He is of no use.’

‘We shall see presently; he is improving already,’ Vane answered. To send the man away at a moment’s notice would be to make him more careful in future acts of deception, to the disadvantage of other patients. Vane’s charity was of a large-hearted kind, that

took consideration of all men. If he could just improve this stupid attendant by ever so little it would be to the advantage of mankind.

‘I ain’t unreasonable,’ urged the man, seeing his place in jeopardy. ‘One does what one’s been used to doing; and I ain’t above learning from them as has had the advantage of education.’

‘Very well; get me a basin of water and a sponge.’

‘I’ll do that,’ said Folly, eagerly.

‘I want you here!’

Folly returned to his side obediently, like a child, while the attendant showed his zeal by hastening out of the room for the desired things.

‘Where did you get that young man, Folly?’ Vane asked.

‘He lived near us in the Lambeth Road, and came in to offer his services when my father became too difficult for me to manage. He had nearly set the house on fire, and was more terrible than when you saw him. Oh, I can’t tell you——’

‘I don’t want to know. I am asking about this young man.’

‘He said he was used to these cases; he had been in Bedlam.’

‘Did he say why he left?’

‘Because the doctors there wanted him to be too hard with the patients.’

‘You had told him, perhaps, that you thought of sending your father there—was it so?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where did you get this bed from?’

‘It belongs to him; he said it was not so painful as the strait-jacket. But they were lies; I see through him now. Let me send him away directly. But perhaps you won’t stay with me?’

‘Yes I will; but I must have help, and this young fellow may serve me better than one who knows nothing. What is his name?’

‘Smith.’

‘Have you had a doctor in?’

‘Yes, and he has sent physic, and told us to keep the room warm, but ventilated.’

‘Did Smith recommend him?’

‘Yes. Oh, he must be a bad doctor.’

‘Not necessarily; only if Smith recommended him he couldn’t well find fault with Smith’s instrument of torture. Now, Folly, will you entrust your father to me?’

‘You are not going to part us?’ she said, imploringly.

‘No. But you must do what I ask you to do?’

‘Yes, yes, I will. I would trust anything to you. What are you going to do?’

‘We will take your father out of that machine, and make him comfortable in the next room. Go and tell some one to light the fire.’

Folly ran off eagerly to execute the commission; at the door she met Smith bearing the basin of water. She would have liked nothing better than to smack his fat, stupid face; but, in consideration for Vane, she let him pass with a frown.

Since the straps had been loosened John Morrison had dozed off once or twice, and awoke again with a wrench at his bands.

‘Where are the medicines, Smith?’

‘Here they are, sir.’ Smith brought the bottles for examination, and pointed proudly to the fact that two doses were gone from one and three from another, as the time required. This exemplary attention excited Vane’s suspicion.

‘It will soon be time for another dose of chloral. Does he take it readily?’

‘Lord bless you, no, sir; that’s another of

his artful dodges. He says he don't want to be cured, and won't open his mouth.'

'Then how do you administer the physic?'

'Oh, I managed to get it down him somehow,' answered Smith, reddening; 'but it was a terrible job, I can tell you, sir.'

'Did you give it him in a spoon?'

'Spoon, sir! Bless you, he'd have spilt it out of that. Oh, no; I gave it him in a good big glass, sir—that one over there on the little table.' Smith grew bold in imparting this little bit of verisimilitude to his assertion.

'Fetch me the glass.'

Smith obeyed, and Vane put it up to his nose and held it there, keeping his eyes all the while on Smith, who grew red and white, and looked first at the ceiling, then at the floor, and finally at Vane, in as pretty a state of confusion as a discovered liar could exhibit.

Vane put down the glass, shaking his head, and then said:

'Smith, I want the help of a decent young fellow, who knows something of hospital practice, and whom I can trust. Not one that will tell me a lie when I ask a straight-

forward question; do you know of such a man ?

Smith scratched his ear and looked sheepish.

‘ I won’t try to deceive you again, sir ; upon my soul I won’t.’

‘ Very well, you shall have a chance ; and, take my word for it, you’ll find it easier to be honest, and more paying in the long run. You’re not half bad enough to succeed as a liar.’

Folly, hearing the fag-end of this dialogue as she stood by the half-opened door, wondered why Vane, if he was really a good man, should ‘ encourage ’ a liar.

‘ The fire is lit,’ she said, coming to Vane’s side.

The old man was still sleeping, with fitful starts and frequent struggles to free himself.

‘ Come, Smith, we must get him up now. He can never sleep strapped with his back down on that leathern mattress of yours.’

‘ Will you have no straps on him, sir ?’

‘ Not one. Come, Folly, work.’

With a little cry of joyful acquiescence, Folly put her nimble fingers to the task, and had undone all upon her side of the bed before Vane, with the assistance of Smith,

now violently anxious to help, had undone all upon their side.

‘Get out of the way!’ she said, sharply, pushing the lumpy attendant aside, and taking his place.

‘Mind, miss,’ said Smith, warningly; ‘the gent’s bound to be violent.’

‘Poor old fellow!’ said Vane, softly lifting John Morrison in the bed, and resting the bewildered head against his own shoulder; ‘poor old fellow! he hasn’t enough strength left for violence.’



CHAPTER III.

VANE'S INTERVIEW WITH THE DOCTOR.

THE two men carried John Morrison into the next room, and laid him in Folly's bed; he was too exhausted to comprehend what was taking place or to oppose it. His eyes closed before Folly had finished disposing the bed-clothes comfortably around him. She looked in his face, and, seeing the altered expression there, was taken with a sudden apprehension. She turned her eyes inquiringly upon Vane, and he read in them the question her tongue was powerless to ask—

‘Will he awake again?’

‘When he wakes he will need some food,’ Vane said. ‘Have you any prepared?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, with a bright, grateful

smile ; ' I will see to it at once.' She left the room, and went to the kitchen, where Miss Clip had taken refuge during the storm.

' So you've sent him away,' said Miss Clip. ' Poor Mr. Roland ! I saw him go from the side window, looking more like death than——'

' Don't bother. Where's the chicken ? Did you do as I told you about the advertisements ?'

' Yes. My brother-in-law wrote them out and took them, and they'll come out in to-morrow morning's paper.'

While Folly was still in the kitchen, *le géant* returned with the phaeton, and knocked at the servants' door, and said to Miss Clip, who opened it :

' Master told me to ask if Mrs. Aveling required the ponies before I put them away ?'

Miss Clip returned to the kitchen and delivered the message.

' Tell him to take the carriage back to his master, and say that I never wish to use it again,' Folly said.

She spoke in a voice loud enough to be heard by Richard Vane as he came downstairs. He entered the kitchen while poor Miss Clip was still hesitating about taking

the message from one friend which it would hurt her other friend to receive. Folly reddened, feeling ashamed to be found out in an act which she knew would be disapproved of by the merciful man.

‘I have had nothing to eat since breakfast time,’ Vane said, addressing Miss Clip.

‘Oh, I’ll get you something directly, sir,’ answered she, readily accepting the less objectionable task. As she left the kitchen Vane looked straight into Folly’s face.

‘Shall I take that message?’ he asked.

Folly was silent a moment; then, gathering up her courage, she answered :

‘No ; I’ll give it myself.’

She brushed by Vane, and went to the side door, where *le géant* waited.

‘Master told me to ask if you would wish to use the ponies before I put them in the stable, ’m?’

‘No ;’ Folly replied, and closed the door with an emphatic bang.

Richard Vane was cutting away at a loaf of bread when she returned. Miss Clip, behind his back, made significant gestures.

‘Oh, you must have something better than that!’ Folly exclaimed. ‘There’s a

dining-room and table-cloths and cutlery, I know——'

'Yes, but there's nothing to eat!' Miss Clip said, gently.

The catering had been left to Folly.

'Bread-and-cheese is good enough when one's hungry,' he said. 'We can go on with this until the chicken's cooked.'

'That's for my father.'

'And us too. He shall have his share. We can't allow him to eat a fowl all by himself.'

Folly smiled.

'And I don't see why that giant should not fetch some beer when he has put the steeds up; let him bring bottles if his button-ship objects to carrying a jug.'

'There's a cellar full of wine,' said Folly, quickly.

'Very good for ladies, but I'm thinking of myself and my friend Smith upstairs. I should think, by the size of him, Smith's fond of his beer, and, as he is just beginning to be useful, we must not let him want. Now, Folly, here are two pieces of cheese and two pieces of bread; which will you have?'

Folly hesitated a moment, for, despite

Vane's efforts to rob the situation of its tragic semblance, she could not quite drop into the ordinary habits of every-day life; but as Vane turned over the cheese to display a blue streak in the creamy substance and tempt her, she yielded to the calls of nature and accepted the homely food. Taking the plate in her hand, she was about to rest on the corner of the table, when recollecting that chairs were more befitting a solemn occasion, she stopped short and looked up to see if Vane had detected her.

‘Do you like sitting on kitchen tables, Folly?’

Folly smiled and nodded.

‘So do I. It is one of the good purposes of a kitchen table.’

As he spoke, Vane seated himself in accordance with his tastes, and Folly did likewise.

It was a strange picture—a beautiful young girl, in a dress worth sixty guineas, sitting on a kitchen-table eating bread-and-cheese with a relish, after experiencing emotions which would have prostrated nine out of ten ordinary ‘young ladies.’

Miss Clip heaved a sigh of relief, and sought *le géant* with the blandest of smiles.

‘What will you drink, Folly?’ asked Vane.

‘Whatever you like I like.’

‘Then we will wait for the beer. Capital cheese! What is your attendant’s name?’

‘Clip—Miss Clip.’

‘Miss Clip, will you take a piece of cheese now, or will you wait till the table is unoccupied?’

‘Presently, sir, if you please,’ replied Miss Clip, smiling as only a dressmaker and an old maid can smile.

‘And how did you find the man in livery? Was he condescending?’

‘He only waited to take his coat off, sir.’

‘A concession to pride which may be overlooked; he shall have a whole glassful for himself. And while he is warm with the generous beverage I should persuade him to fetch what vegetables or other household articles you require, Miss Clip.’

While Miss Clip and Folly were making out a list of the things they required, Vane put aside his plate, and from among the letters in his pocket took a plain post-card.

‘All going well. I shall not return to-night.—R. V.,’ he wrote with his pencil on

one side; on the other he put the address, 'Miss Vane, 53, Church Street, Spitalfields.' This he entrusted to *le géant* to post, when that young gentleman was soon after despatched upon other errands.

They drank beer, still sitting on the table, and Vane, having asked and obtained permission, drew a pipe from his pocket and filled it.

'You want a light,' said Folly, jumping to the ground and taking the spill from Miss Clip, who, equally anxious to serve, had twisted the paper and taken it to the fire.

Folly held the light and saw the tobacco ignite with a little sigh of satisfaction.

And perhaps the trifling service she thus rendered a good man gave her greater gratification than she derived from the consummation of her long prepared revenge.

'Is it *quite* alight?' she asked, lingering as the flame approached her hand.

'Yes. You'll burn your fingers if you don't take care.'

'I shouldn't mind,' she answered.

She would have liked to make some sacrifice, even the burning of her fingers, to satisfy her own sense of gratitude—not to prove it.

She seated herself near him again, with an indefinable yearning happiness in her heart, which excluded for the time all graver anxieties from her memory. She would have liked to sit quite still and watch Richard Vane enjoying his pipe. Some knotty point occupied his thoughts for a few seconds, and she sat watching his thoughtful face and the grey smoke that rose from his lips, without knowing why it made her happy to do so, without consciousness, even, that she was watching him and his pipe, until he turned and looked her in the face ; then she smiled, returning his calm gaze timidly, blinking her eyes like a pleased child—she who had impudence and audacity enough to stare down a prince of the blood one night at the theatre.

* * * * *

‘The doctor!’ exclaimed Miss Clip, as a knock at the door reached the ears of those in the kitchen.

‘Show him into the drawing-room, if you please. I have something to say to him,’ said Vane, with a longer puff at his pipe and a contraction of his nostrils.

The conjecture was right. The doctor had arrived.

Richard Vane waited coolly until his pipe was smoked out, sitting thoughtful and quiet the while; then he rose, knocked out the ashes on the bar of the fireplace, and restored the pipe to his pocket.

‘May I come with you?’ Folly asked.

‘Yes. But I have your permission to act as I think right towards this doctor?’

‘Of course you have.’

‘Then come along, Folly: let’s tackle him.’

Entering the drawing-room, Vane found himself face to face with a young man with sharp eyes and a capacious head.

‘My name is Vane—Richard Vane. May I ask yours?’

The young man stared with astonishment.

‘My name is Chambers — Clement Chambers,’ he answered, with an accent of assumed contempt.

‘May I ask if you are a doctor, or merely a practitioner?’

‘I have taken my degree in the London College of Physicians, if you understand what that means.’ Despite the cool tone he adopted, the doctor was evidently ill at ease. Turning from Vane to Folly, he said: ‘How is the patient now?’

‘He is much better.’

The doctor looked surprised and relieved.

‘I thought,’ said he, ‘from the peculiar manner in which this a—Mr. Vane introduced himself, that some unpleasant change had taken place; but since he is progressing favourably under my treatment, an explanation appears necessary.’

‘You shall have it when you have seen your patient,’ said Vane, opening the door for Folly.

As Dr. Chambers was about to follow her, Vane stepped between and took the precedence. The doctor hesitated a moment, then, swallowing the affront, followed.

‘There is your patient,’ said Vane, when they came into the bed-chamber. The doctor looked round to the bed in astonishment, and saw John Morrison sleeping. ‘And now,’ added Vane, opening the door, ‘if you will come with me, I will give you the explanation that appears to you necessary?’

Dr. Chambers looked at Folly: she stared at him in return; then he looked at Smith: Smith looked in another direction. With a little gesture of amused perplexity which he was far from feeling, he entered the boudoir with Vane.

‘Well, sir?’ he asked.

‘You wish to know why I asked if you were a practitioner merely, or a doctor. It was because I wished to know if your conduct is palliated by stupidity, or aggravated by a knowledge of the faculty you profess.’

‘This is outrageous. I will not stay to be insulted by any man.’

‘As you will: there is the door. If you will not take your lesson from me, you shall from the law.’

‘You are pleased to be lenient,’ said the doctor, with a sneer, at the same time turning an uncomfortable look at the door and Folly.

‘I am pleased to be lenient when I think lenience may be practised to advantage.’

Dr. Chambers saw he had no ordinary man to deal with. Dropping the sarcastic tone he had assumed, he said:

‘Will you be good enough to tell me my offence?’

‘The offence of torturing a man to the point of death for a few guineas.’

‘I do not understand you,’ interrupted the doctor.

‘Come here, and exercise the same intelligence which obtained you your degree.’

Vane walked to the farther side of the bed, and removed the coverlet, exposing the leathern mattress and the straps. 'This machine is perhaps better known to you than to me. It looks like an old, and a very old, surgical apparatus, such as might be used for amputations ; is it ?'

'I cannot say ; such bedsteads are not used in the hospitals now.'

'It is not good enough for that temporary purpose ?'

'I cannot say.'

'"Will not say," would be an honest expression, Dr. Chambers. I will put the question more clearly. Do you think this hard, uncovered, leather surface is the proper bed on which to strap down a man rapidly sinking under repeated attacks of frenzy—one whose mind is in a highly excited condition, and to whom sleep is the one essential thing? Tell me, do you think you could sleep on such a bed? Do you think you could lie on it awake, strapped in one position for twenty-four hours, without going out of your mind—without attempting, in your desperation, to end your life?'

'I did not provide the bed—I did not see the straps. I—I am not supposed to know

what takes place in my absence. I prescribe the medicines, and I may claim, as the result of my prescription, the fact that my patient sleeps and is better.'

'If you think to evade the consequences of wilful neglect by that argument you are mistaken. In the first place your medicines were not administered; and in the second, your patient did not sleep until he was released from the torture to which you relin- quished him. You make your case worse by attempting to defend action which it is clear you cannot justify to yourself. It behoves you to be penitent rather than obdurate, standing as you do within the range of punishment, and in need of mercy. If re- tribution alone were required, you should be punished and disgraced. A sin even of care- lessness is not pardoned in one who under- takes the care of a fellow-creature, and exposure of complicity with such a man as Smith would ruin you. It is this considera- tion, united with the hope that, taking this warning to heart, you may yet do good and useful work, benefiting others by the proper use of that knowledge you have given the best years of your life to obtain, that appeals to forbearance. Dr. Chambers, you can go!'

The young doctor raised his eyes from the ground, and looked in Vane's face with evident emotion ; then he bowed, and left the room in silence.

Richard Vane had made another convert to humanity.



CHAPTER IV.

A LESSON IN CHRISTIANITY.



OLLY watched the scene between Richard Vane and the young doctor with trembling interest, her admiration of Vane rising as it progressed.

He had shown that he could be merciful and gentle ; now she saw he could be wrathful too.

A merely merciful man she might have regarded with contempt as a spiritless fool ; but here was one whose anger carried the more weight from his previous gentleness.

He was clever enough to detect and expose the iniquities of cunning men ; wise enough to prescribe the remedies a doctor failed to administer.

She said to herself, 'This is the best and wisest man that lives,' and refrained from venting her own indignation upon the discomfited young doctor for fear of producing an anti-climax. She felt sure this justly resentful man would crush the wrongdoer with a final blow.

When the *dénouement* came she was astonished and disappointed. After all her hero was not just. That a bad man, convicted of his cruelty, should be permitted to escape without further punishment than private censure contravened her theatrical and Biblical notions of justice altogether.

'It is not right,' she said to Vane when the doctor had withdrawn. 'If I had known all this I would have spent every penny I had in punishing those two men rather than that they should get off in this way.'

'Why?'

'Because they deserve punishment.'

'If you could, you would have strapped them down to that bed, one after the other—take it in turns—until they had suffered all that your father suffered, eh, Folly?'

'Yes, that is just what I would have done,' she replied emphatically.

Resolute with her own convictions, she

stood facing Richard Vane, as if waiting for an explanation of the leniency which appeared to her unwarrantable.

For a moment he hesitated, doubting if this were the most fitting time to assail the stout little rebel. He anticipated greater difficulty in subduing her spirit than he had encountered in bringing others to a sense of reason and Christianity. Then he said, drawing a chair to one of the windows :

‘ Sit down here, Folly.’

She obeyed, and he left her for a time, going into the next room to see to John Morrison. The old man was still sleeping. Miss Clip was waiting outside the door. Vane told her to bring the attendant bread and cheese and a bottle of beer, and then returned to the inner room, closing the door gently after him.

‘ Folly,’ he said, taking a seat near her, ‘ tell me what is cruelty ?’

‘ Cruelty is unkindness : to hurt helpless creatures is cruelty. To strap my poor father down upon that bed, and to deceive me by saying it was necessary, that is cruelty. Why do you ask ? You have shown the cruelty of it yourself.’

‘Now tell me again, does anything justify cruelty?’

‘No, nothing—except,’ she added quickly, anticipating the use Vane would make of her admission, ‘except cruelty. To torture those two men as they tortured others would be justice. But I see you do not believe in punishment.’

‘Yes I do. But it must be just, or it ceases to be merely punishment, and becomes cruelty greater than that it avenges. The punishment that causes a man to regret his wrongdoing, and retards him from repeating his offence, the punishment that serves as an example to others to be merciful and just—that is good. But the punishment unfairly proportioned to the offence, which makes the sufferer feel he is unjustly dealt with, and does not serve as an example to others, because it is seen to be unjust and unworthy of respect—that is bad. It fails to touch the punished man’s heart with remorse, because he feels that his offence is more than expiated; it serves to make him an enemy of justice, hardens his heart against its better influences, and leads him by cunning to avoid future detection. Unfair punishment is worse than no punishment at all.’

‘I want only justice. Whatever is just is right.’

‘That is true, Folly. And now you yourself shall tell me how much torture Smith shall receive in order that his punishment may be just. Remember that if you give him less or more than his desert you fall short of justice or exceed it. You must consider the difference in the two men, and find out whether Smith is less able to endure pain than your father, or more. Again, you must allow for the man’s natural stupidity, and agree as to the amount of restraint he considered it necessary to impose. A thousand other considerations must be balanced one against the other before it can be guessed how much he should suffer. You said whatever is just is right; and it follows that whatever is unjust is not right.’

Folly shook her head in thoughtful silence. She could not answer Vane’s argument, yet still felt that there was reason in her demand for punishment.

‘How much actual physical suffering should be inflicted upon that man Smith,’ Vane continued, ‘it is not for you or me to determine. If we were the wisest and most impartial judges in the world, we should probably dis-

agree upon that point. Possibly no man ever is punished in exact accordance with the justice of his case, and this is the reason why nine-tenths of the criminals sent to prison leave it worse men than when they entered.'

'Then why are men imprisoned?'

'That the world may be benefited—that the punishment publicly administered to offenders may deter others from offending. It is only savage nations and barbarous people who use punishment as retaliation. No punishment can repair an injury. What is done cannot be undone. It only remains for wise people to use the best means in their power to prevent the recurrence of a past misfortune. A child stumbling over an unseen object in the road turns and kicks the object; a foolish and careless man doing the like feels angry with himself, and leaves the thing lying there for others to fall over; but a wise man removes the object from the path that others may not suffer. If a brick fell from a badly constructed house and killed a man, we shouldn't throw the brick away, but use it to reconstruct the building properly, and help to make it firm and safe for the future. Would not you do the same, Folly?

Folly shook her head.

‘When I strike my head against a door I feel as if I should like to—to—to kick it, like the child; and if a brick fell and hurt anyone I loved I would take a hammer and smash it all up into powder. It should never be used again.’

Vane saw that the task before him was hardly to be mastered by reason.

‘Would that be wise?’ he asked.

‘No; but it would be natural. It is impossible to be wise when one feels deeply.’

‘I hope not.’

‘That is,’ said Folly, flushing as she called to mind the feeling Vane had shown, ‘it is impossible for a woman.’

‘I think not.’

‘Well, it is for me.’

‘Then you admit you are not wise.’

Folly hung her head in silence.

‘And if you are not wise, but only revengeful, how can you determine what punishment Smith and Dr. Chambers should receive?’

Folly, feeling the ground slipping from under her feet, made a struggle to maintain her position.

‘You say that the wisest cannot tell how

much punishment should be inflicted upon a rascal ; then why should not I settle the point as well as the wisest ?

‘ It is not a question whether you or some one else shall do wrong, Folly. It would not be difficult to show that you should not. The question you raised is—have I punished these men sufficiently ?’

‘ You have not punished them at all.’

‘ I think I have. Dr. Chambers, I am sure, regrets the past and will do better in future. Smith is harder to deal with because of his ignorance ; but I hope to make a better man of him. I believe that both will feel regret for what they have done. I appeal to your reason, Folly—the reason that raises you above the level of savages and beasts. It is agreed that men should be punished according to their deserts ; but as no one but the offender himself can know how great his desert is, his punishment must always depend upon the state of his own conscience. Any punishment that does not arise from his own conscience he regards as an expiation of his sin. When the fine demanded by justice is paid there is an end of it, the man considers himself absolved and free to sin again ; but if the punishment arises from a sense of the

wrong he has done and takes the form of remorse, the lesson sinks deep into his nature and is never forgotten. In some cases public punishment is necessary for public advantage—the one suffering for the many; but there are other cases in which the same end may be equally well served by more merciful means.’

Folly shook her head.

‘You still believe in the efficacy of punishment?’

Folly nodded.

‘I have been told you are fond of driving; did you ever drive a pony that shied?’

‘Yes.’

‘And how did you serve him?’

‘Whipped him.’

‘Then you are behind a common cabman in intelligence and humanity.’

Folly looked up indignantly.

‘While I was waiting for you at the church,’ continued Vane, ‘a cab came along, and the horse shied at a drain in the road. The man, instead of thrashing the nervous animal, got down and led it back over the drain two or three times, patting its neck each time; then he got on to the box-seat, and when he drove over the hole again the horse, though still timid, did not shy.’

‘It is not a question of cab-horses and cabmen,’ said Folly, with something of impudence in her tone.

‘I cannot think you would beat a child even if it did wrong—certainly not before you had exhausted all gentle means of inducing it to do right.’

‘What have I done that you should compare me first to a vile cabman and then to a wretch who would beat a child?’ exclaimed Folly.

‘Then you would not beat a child?’

‘A dear little innocent child!’

‘It needs but a little consideration to make you extend your pity and forbearance, if not your love, towards ignorant men and women, who are the neglected children of the world.’

‘Neglected children of the world!’ Folly echoed the words in a tone of sadness, and sat thoughtful for a while, regardless of Vane’s silence as he watched her expressive face; then she looked up at Vane with trouble in her eyes, and her lips quivered as if she were about to ask him a question.

‘What am I? Am I one of the neglected children of this world?’ was the simple question that sought utterance of her lips; but her heart failed her, forbidding her lips

to do their office, as she anticipated his reply.

Vane's eyes seemed to bid her speak, encouraging her to make that confession of doubt which would be an acknowledgment of her error. She shook her head as if in reply to this mute appeal, and in silence turned her face away.

‘Do you know why I have been so anxious to convince you that it is right to pardon such an offence as that committed by the man Smith?’ Vane asked.

‘Tell me,’ she answered, still keeping her eyes from his.

‘That you may repent of the wrong you yourself have done.’

Folly was not angry now; she made no sign. Vane continued:

‘I want to release your heart from the thralldom of false ideas. If I am right in any conjecture it is in this—that you have done a cruel thing in obedience to a wrong notion of principle. You have steeled your heart, and suppressed its gentle impulses. It was tender compassion which made you hesitate in entering the church to-day; was it not so?’

“And thine eye shall not pity: but life

shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,"' said Folly.

Vane groaned.

'What else have you learnt from that book?' he asked.

'I have learnt that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children—that is all I have learnt; it is enough.'

'Too much. It is that pernicious teaching which made men bloodthirsty and brutal—which kept them down to the savage and revengeful instincts of beasts—which would have spread its baleful influence still wider but that one man stood up protesting against it, and taught the people the doctrine of humanity and love which we profess to this day. Alas! the evils of that barbarous doctrine cling to us now, tainting our laws and religion.'

Folly heard with wonder, turning her eyes to Vane, whose brows were knitted with anger. 'They told me it was a good book, and that the best men in the world believed its teachings,' she said.

'It is a beautiful flower, from which may be distilled healthful medicines and fatal poisons—a thing not to be plucked at and used carelessly by a child. They were Jews

who received that wicked lesson of vengeance, and he was a Jew who stood up boldly against them all, learned and great, and said: "This teaching is false; you shall not take an eye for an eye; you shall not do unto men who have harmed you the harm they have done unto you; but you shall treat them all as if they were your brothers, forgiving their faults, and treating them as you would wish them to treat you if you had committed a fault." That man's Bible was his own conscience—the faculty of knowing right from wrong which God has planted in everyone's heart—in yours not less than others. Our minds are ever subject to error—our hearts never. In them is written the true creed, and that we must be guided by, not by the belief of our forefathers. This was what the young Jew, a simple, unlearned man, taught.'

'Did men believe him?'

'Some, a few; others persecuted him. But all who call themselves Christians now profess to think as he thought.'

'But they don't. I never knew a man who thought as you do about punishment. Is it you who are mistaken?—did he teach forgiveness as you do?'

'You shall judge for yourself, Folly. One

day, when this young man was sitting among the poor people teaching them simple lessons of truth and goodness—he could neither read nor write, so all that he taught was suited to their understandings—some of the men who wished to convict him of a punishable fault brought a woman before him who had done wrong, and said: “This woman was taken in the very act of committing sin, and according to the law of Moses she should be stoned to death. What shall we do with her?” The young man did not reply, but bent down as if he had not heard, and drew lines with his finger in the dust at his feet, perhaps thinking how he might answer, so that the woman should be spared without breaking the laws of his nation. But the men would not be satisfied without a reply, and pressed him again and again, until, raising himself, he said: “He amongst you who is without sin, let him cast the first stone;” and then he stooped down, tracing figures on the ground, as before. The accusers were perplexed, for no one dared cast the first stone; all knew they had committed sins themselves at some time or other, and so one after the other they went away, from the eldest to the

youngest, leaving the woman free whom they had brought there to kill.'

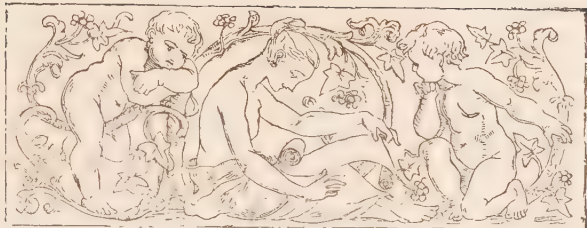
'But the young man who was good—what did he do?' asked Folly, with interest.

'When he raised himself up again, and saw no one there but the woman, he said: "Where are the men that brought you here? Has none condemned you?" And she answered: "No man, Lord." Then he said: "Neither do I. Go, and sin no more."'

'Ah, that was good!' said Folly, clasping her hands.

'I knew it was in your heart to think so,' said Vane, gladly. 'Tell me now, Folly, is not forgiveness better than revenge?'

Folly, stubborn yet, put up her hands and covered her face, fearing it would reveal the remorse and humiliation of her heart.



CHAPTER V.

THE LESSON CONTINUED.

VANE, not wishing to force an acknowledgment of error from Folly, but desiring rather that she should take the higher position of one who generously yields from self-conviction, did not pursue the subject further at that time. He rose from his seat and left the room. In the next chamber he found the patient still sleeping, Smith in whispering consultation with Miss Clip at the door.

‘If you please, sir,’ said she, seeing Vane, ‘that Doctor Chambers have come back, and wishes to see you, if you please, sir; he is waiting downstairs, sir!’ Poor woman, had Richard Vane been the sternest of recording angels, she could not have felt more nervous

or more conscious of her sins in his presence.

Vane ran lightly down the stairs and came upon the young doctor standing in the hall. Seeing that he was agitated and wished to make a communication, Vane opened the door of the drawing-room and ushered him in.

‘Mr. Vane,’ said Dr. Chambers, his fingers trembling visibly as he spoke, ‘I have returned, not to acknowledge my obligations to you—they are too deep to be so easily discharged—but to do my duty. I have to confess that the medicines I prescribed last night are unfit to be used to-day. The dose of chloral was purposely made to counteract the effects of that bed upon my patient, and is too great for his present requirement. You must allow me to send other medicines or take the advice of another doctor.’

‘Are you confident of your own power to deal with this case?’

‘Quite. The disease from which he suffers has been my special study.’

‘In that case send the proper medicines. I shall call in another physician, and you may meet him here if you please.’

Dr. Chambers murmured a few unintelligible words—gratitude overcoming him—and

moved towards the door with uncertain, trembling steps.

‘I shall be glad to see you at seven o’clock this evening,’ said Richard Vane, as he opened the door.

Dr. Chambers had no necessity to enter *that* engagement in his note-book.

Half an hour later the new medicines came, with full and explicit directions as to the treatment of the patient. John Morrison still slept.

As Vane was unwrapping the bottles Folly came from her boudoir, pale, but composed. She did not look at him, but went straight to where her father lay.

Whatever impression the good vicar’s teaching had made upon her mind, it was not apparent in any gentler feeling towards the offender Smith.

‘Go farther away,’ she said, taking his place beside the bed.

The humiliated attendant withdrew meekly, and Folly seated herself to watch with cat-like passivity.

‘Can I help you at all, sir?’ asked Smith, humbly.

‘You may set the chairs straight and sweep up the hearth,’ said Vane.

‘I can do that,’ whispered Folly, springing up and coming forward in jealous haste. ‘Give me that brush. What do you know about sweeping up a hearth?’ Then she added, addressing Vaue, ‘Make him sit down till he’s wanted.’

‘I want him to go to Spitalfields for me at some time, and perhaps none would be better than this,’ replied Vane, smiling.

‘Yes, yes; send him to Spitalfields.’ Folly did not know where the place was, but hoped it might be very remote. ‘Let him go to Spitalfields at once; but—’ suddenly checking herself, ‘what is it you want? Can’t I get it for you?’

‘No; I’ve looked in the rooms below for a readable book, and can’t find one; and I’m afraid you have not in your wardrobe an old coat that would fit me.’

‘An old coat?’

‘Yes; this is my best, and I can never make myself comfortable in it.’

‘Aren’t you going to leave us?’ she asked, with eager hope in her face.

‘Not while I’m wanted.’

Folly’s lips closed, and a yearning came upon her to throw her arms about this Christian man and kiss him.

‘This will be the first to administer,’ said Vane, reading the direction upon the bottle in his hand, and not noticing the rapt regard the young girl fixed upon him. Folly turned away with a sigh. ‘If he were only a woman!’ she thought.

‘Do you know Spitalfields, Smith?’ asked Vane, setting the bottle beside the others on a little table, withdrawn so as to be unseen by the patient when he awoke.

‘Yes, sir, well.’

‘Go to Church Street, 53—write down the number—and inquire for Miss Vane.’

‘Miss Vane—53; yes, sir.’

‘Ask for “The Newcomes,” and my grey jacket, and my long pipe.’

‘“Newcomes,” grey jacket, and long pipe; yes, sir.’

‘Be careful you don’t lose any of them,’ said Folly, brushing the hearth and knocking the corners viciously.

She watched the departure of Smith for the desired things with envy. Old pipes and jackets she couldn’t supply, but those other things she might be able to procure for him.

‘What are Newcomes?’ she asked.

‘“Newcomes?” that is the title of a book.’

‘I hate books,’ said Folly, in disgust.

‘Well, you see, we poor fellows who can’t do crochet and needlework, and things of that kind, must find something to amuse ourselves with.’

‘Can’t I get anything for you?’ she asked despondingly, looking round the room.

‘Yes, Folly, dinner. The time is getting on, and dinner’s another thing without which men are uneasy.’

‘I will see about it now, directly. What time do you think *he* will wake?’

‘I hope he will sleep for some time yet. It will do him more good than medicine, and I fear we shan’t be able to make him eat much. However, I must eat, and so must you. What time do you go to the theatre?’

‘I ought to go at six, but I don’t want to.’

‘You must keep your engagements.’

Folly sighed. For the first time her vocation was distasteful to her. The excitement which had supported her through the past trying days was gone; her self-esteem was shaken: she felt that there was something higher to attain to than a public recognition of her personal attractions, and that she was far removed from it.

Notwithstanding her engagements, she would not have gone to the theatre that

night of her own free will, but Vane had said she must, and therefore she obeyed.

‘ You don’t look at all well,’ said Mr. Barrington, meeting her at the stage door.

‘ No. I shouldn’t wonder if I break down to-night,’ was Folly’s consolatory reply.

But the music, the light, and the applause at her first entry upon the scene had its wonted effect upon the young girl, chasing away every grave thought of past and future, and crazing her with delight. She sent her dresser out of the dressing-room, and sat alone when she was not on the stage, thinking, with her head resting on her hands, vaguely of her father, and Vane, and Roland ---now her husband---and having the dull, cheerless feeling of one who labours at starting under the weight of a burden that must be carried to the journey’s end. At the conclusion of the burlesque she left the house quickly, refusing to answer the questions that were put to her by those who noticed the ring on her finger and the absence of Roland Aveling. *Le géant* was waiting with the ponies ; Miss Clip sat in the phaeton.

‘ You here, Clip ! What is the news—my father ?’ asked Folly, in astonishment.

‘ He is better, miss—mum—I beg your

pardon,' answered Miss Clip, correcting herself. 'And Mr. Vane, he ordered me to come, because I think he believed you would wish to know the news.'

Folly nodded her head, still standing beside the carriage. She had said to herself she would never drive the ponies her husband had given her for a wedding present, but it was necessary she should do so now, or that Miss Clip should squeeze herself into *le géant's* seat behind to make place for him in the driver's place. Reluctantly Folly stepped into the carriage and took the reins from *le géant*. The excitement of driving through the streets was good for her—an effect which doubtless had entered into Vane's consideration, for he guided himself and directed others as he would pieces on a chess-board, with a regard to all collateral consequences. Her attention was fully occupied in the management of her spirited ponies as she drove through the crowded streets, until the river was crossed; then, speaking for the first time, she asked :

'When did my father wake ?'

'Soon after you left, miss—that is, mum.'

'Don't call me mum, I hate the word. Well ?'

‘He was very violent with Mr. Smith until Mr. Vane came out of the next room, and then he grew as quiet as a lamb, seeming to be quite afraid of him, though anyone more kind and gentle you never see; and how he did it is a mystery, but I think it must be by the heye.’

‘What do you mean “by the heye”?’

‘Well, miss—mum, that is miss, I don’t know if it’s the same with you, but when Mr. Vane looks at me it makes me feel as if I could see what he wishes and felt bound to obey. I believe if he was to look at me and say to himself, “Annie Clip, just you go and jump out of winder,” I should go and do it. There is such things as mesmerism, which is, I’m told, a gift of the heye, and preaps this Mr. Vane, bein’ a clergyman——’

‘Don’t talk nonsense!’ said Folly, not, however, without a feeling of awe such as the ignorant and superstitious have in thinking of unexplained power. ‘I suppose Mr. Vane’s power depended more on the strength of his arms and hands than on his eye.’

‘No he didn’t, miss—ch—miss, asking your pardon; he told Mr. Smith to let go of the old gentleman, which he was not willing to do, seeing that your pa was so violent, and

that Mr. Vane stood at the foot of the bed quite a long way off. However, Mr. Vane he said: "Take your hands away, Smith"; and then when Mr. Smith obeyed, your poor pa jumped right out of bed, and was running towards the door, when he ketched sight of Mr. Vane, and stopped dead short like as if he'd run up against a barrier. "Get into bed," said Mr. Vane, quite quiet like; and just as if he'd been a child the old gentleman turned round and got into bed.'

Folly listened with increasing awe. Her thoughts were so far away that the ponies came nearly into collison with a hansom dashing across the road without her noticing the fact.

'Go on,' said she to her companion.

'Your poor pa drew the clothes over his head. Mr. Vane went to the table and poured out a dose of medicine in a glass. "He'll smash the glass, sir," whispered Mr. Smith. Mr. Vane took no notice, but, carrying the glass to the bedside, he says, "Sit up, John,"—just like that, miss, and as if he was speaking to some one he'd known a long while. Well, miss—that is—yes, miss—your pa takes and sits up, looking at Mr. Vane all the while as if he couldn't take his eyes off.

“Now drink that,” says Mr. Vane, holding out the glass. Your pa took the glass, drank the medicine, and handed back the glass. “There’s a fine old fellow,” says Mr. Vane, patting him on the shoulder, and your papa seemed quite pleased. “Yes,” says he, “I do what I’m told, don’t I?” he says, smiling. But, lor’, miss, you should have seen that poor Mr. Smith; he sat down in a chair lookin’ as pale as the sheet on the bed, and the perspiration coming out in drops upon his forehead, and says he to me, standing then near him, “It isn’t natural; it’s a miracle, like what we read of in the Bible,” he says.’

Folly herself felt a chill run through her body as she listened.

‘Yes,’ she said in a quick, low voice; ‘and then——’

‘Then Mr. Vane says, “You can lay down now, John”; and down your poor pa lays himself, keeping his eyes fixed all the time on the gentleman. Mr. Vane put the glass away, and then coming back he sits himself on the edge of the bed, filling his pipe and talking to him all the while just as if he was a reasonable old gentleman in his right mind; and bless you, miss, your pa never contradicted him once, but believed every word he

said. He didn't keep thinking it was all lies, as he do when we talk to him ; which of course such a gentleman as that did not go to deceive him as we have been compelled to do, and your poor pa seemed to see that.'

'What did Mr. Vane say ?'

"Well, John," says he, "you've had a bad illness, my poor fellow, but thank God you've got through the worst of it, let us hope."—"Do you think so, master? do you think so?" asked your poor pa, quite eager like. Mr. Vane nodded with his pipe in his mouth, and only said, "If the smoke catches your throat I'll put my pipe out." Now we should have said a thousand things to convince your poor pa that we thought he was gettin' better, and that would have made him suspicious like.'

'Never mind about us, we're only fools,' said Folly ; 'go on about him.'

"I like baccar, master," said your pa, sniffing the smoke.—"Well, we'll ask the doctor if you may have half a whiff," says Mr. Vane. "Have you got a pipe?"—"No, master ; I broke it," replies your pa, "when——"—"Never mind when you broke it. Look at this pipe," says Mr. Vane—for

I expect he see that your father was thinking about the time he tried to stab his throat with the pipe, when he thought the hare was upon him—"Look at this pipe," says Mr. Vane, taking one in a case out of his pocket and giving it to your poor pa, who, in opening the case and getting out the pipe, quite forgot about his own. "Oh, what a beauty, master!" says the old gentleman, taking it out and holding it very carefully. "What a colour! And look at the amber, and the silver, and all—I'll be very careful of it, master. Just let me hold it another minute. My gracious, what a beauty!" "Now, look here, John," says Mr. Vane; "you shall have that pipe as soon as you get well enough to smoke it." "Do you think I shall get well enough?" asks your pa, trembling. "I do, John. You don't think I'd be so mean as to promise it otherwise, do you?"—"No, master, I know you wouldn't. You're a good man, any one can see that; and I'm getting better already, ain't I?"—"Yes; you will astonish the doctors presently; and as for Smith, you'll be able to do without him very soon," says Mr. Vane. "I could do without him now," answers your pa. "But I couldn't," says Mr Vane, laughing. "Per-

haps if you go on just as well as you are now till to-morrow, we will give him his money and send him about his business." "Oh, I'll be reg'lar good. But you won't leave me, will you? 'cause you could defend me if—if——" Then your poor pa broke off, looking round the room in the old way. Mr. Vane takes hold of his hand, and says, "John, look in my face. Now do you think I am the sort of man who would let any harm come to a poor old fellow like you?" And your father, looking him in the face, answers, quite calm, "No, master. Lord love you."'

'Lord love him!' echoed Folly, reverently.

It was some time before Miss Clip broke the silence, and then she narrated how Richard Vane had told John Morrison about the bed he had been strapped in, and by showing him the advantageous alteration which had been made convinced him that he must be better.

By this simple plan of telling the truth Vane had worked his miracle, as others may beside.

When they arrived at the villa, the door, in answer to Folly's knock, was opened by Smith.

Smith was in his shirt-sleeves; he held a

candle in one hand and a hatchet in the other; his face was scarlet, and the sweat stood upon his brow. These appearances were rather terrifying to the over-wrought sensitiveness of the two women who looked upon him.

‘Great goodness! what’s the matter?’ whimpered Miss Clip.

The stout young man grinned from ear to ear, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

‘The gen’leman upstairs has give me half a hour for supper,’ said he; and finding that this was an insufficient explanation, he added: ‘Come and see what I’ve been doing.’

They followed him down the stairs and into the scullery, where upon the floor was a mass of wood, chopped into the size of ordinary fuel.

‘My bed,’ said he, grinning again. ‘My bed, as costed me fifty shillings. It’s a little surprise for the good gentleman upstairs—a present for him.’



CHAPTER VI.

‘IT IS WELL FOR A PARSON TO WEAR A WHITE
HAT.’

LEAVING Miss Clip with Smith, who, not content with the demolition of the wooden frame, now employed himself in mutilating the leather of his bed with malicious blows of his hatchet, Folly went upstairs and stood by the bedroom door listening.

No sound reached her ear.

She turned the handle quietly and looked in. Richard Vane sat in an easy-chair by the fire with his back towards her.

She entered the room, closing the door so softly behind her that she was not heard, and advanced into the room with a light step. In the centre she paused and looked

at the bed ; her father lay there quietly sleeping, his thin deformed hand resting upon the case containing the admired pipe, like a child with its toy. The room was scrupulously neat and tidy, and lit by the flickering light from the cheerful fire ; the shaded reading-lamp on the table at Vane's side cast its light upon the book he was reading. The effect of calm order imparted to Folly's spirit a sense of tranquillity which she seldom enjoyed.

She came and stood at the back of Richard Vane's chair, looking down upon him who had brought peace to her, her heart swelling with grateful love. But she who owed him so much wanted still more, and she felt the yearning of an outcast for a parent's love.

It was something to stand there close by him, to rest her hand upon the back of his chair so that her finger-tips touched the grey fabric of the coat he wore.

Unconscious of this silent adoration, Richard Vane read on.

The fire-light touched his head.

' Ah, if I might just kiss him but for one moment, all unknown ! ' thought Folly.

The wish increased until the temptation became irresistible. She bent down, with

infinite tenderness in her soul, until, lighter than the fall of a moth's wing, her closed lips met a loose curl; then without a sound they parted in a kiss. She raised herself again; a sigh fluttered from her heart, and escaped undetected.

He must at that moment have become conscious of her presence, for he turned his head and looked up at her. No blush rose to her cheek; her face was quite pale—her beautiful eyes wide open, like the innocent eyes of a seraph contemplating her God.

‘Ah, Folly!’ he exclaimed in a low voice, with a glance at the sleeper; ‘I did not hear you come in.’

He closed the book and held up his hand; she pulled her glove off quickly and laid her hand in his, hoping he would hold it a long, long while. It seemed to her that he did not shake hands like ordinary people; there was meaning in the grasp—assurance of generous help and fellowship.

He waited for her to speak, looking in her face, and thinking how beautiful it was—how piteous the expression of the lovely features.

‘I have heard all,’ she said, folding the hand he had held gently with the other.

She went to the bedside and looked at her father.

‘It is a great change, and a happy one,’ said Vane.

She nodded, still looking affectionately upon the wrinkled old face.

‘He looks happy still—happier than I have ever seen him,’ she said. ‘It seemed wonderful when I first heard of it.’ Then she turned, and, looking in Vane’s face, added: ‘It does not now.’

Miss Clip opened the door and announced that supper was waiting.

‘I don’t want to eat,’ answered Folly.

‘Must I have supper alone?’ asked Vane.

‘Have you waited for me?’

‘I should be very stupid or very hungry to forestall such a pleasure.’

Folly’s face grew bright with a smile. A compliment to a girl is never out of time.

Vane gave directions to Smith, who had followed Miss Clip into the room, and then, with the natural gallantry of a well-bred gentleman, offered his arm to Folly and took her downstairs.

‘I think, as the supper is cold, we might have a bottle of wine; what do you say?’ he asked.

Folly nodded gaily, but checking herself suddenly, said with gravity :

‘ If it is quite good to drink wine.’

Vane laughed.

‘ You little goose,’ said he, ‘ it is quite good and right to enjoy every pleasure that does not hurt ourselves or others.’

He went to the cellar and returned with a couple of bottles, one of sparkling wine and the other of whisky.

‘ I have provided for further indulgence ; I like whisky with my pipe after supper,’ said he.

Folly rubbed her hands gleefully. He would let her sit with him while he smoked. ‘ You smoke a great deal,’ she said.

‘ Yes—too much, I’m afraid.’

‘ No, no,’ she answered, with emphasis ; ‘ I don’t think so. I should be sorry if you didn’t.’

‘ Why ?’

‘ It is right for good men to drink whisky and smoke and sit on kitchen tables.’ Vane laughed. ‘ I am speaking quite seriously,’ Folly continued. ‘ I say it is right for good men to be like us in little things ; it brings them nearer to us, and makes us feel that it is not impossible to be like them in greater

things. If you never laughed, were never angry, never set great sorrows aside for a while to think of little pleasures, I should say, "Mr. Vane is not human like me, so how can I, who am human, be like him?"

'You are right, Folly; but I object to personal illustrations and comparisons. Will you cut me a little bread?' He pulled out an old envelope from his pocket and wrote a line upon it. 'That observation of yours is worth remembering,' said he.

'What have you written there?' asked Folly.

'*"It would be well for a parson to wear a white hat sometimes,"*' he read.

Folly, laughing, said, 'Fancy a parson in a white hat!' Then she became thoughtful, seeing the allusion of Vane's quaint memorandum.

After supper Vane left the room to speak with Miss Clip about arranging a bed for himself in the room with John Morrison. Returning to the dining-room, he said:

'Are you sleepy, Folly?'

'Not at all,' she answered. 'May I stay and light your pipe?'

He placed a chair for her near the fire, and took one opposite. Then he filled his pipe.

‘What a large bowl! what a quantity of tobacco it holds!’ said Folly, watching the process with interest. ‘Do you think you’ll have enough to fill it?’ This question she asked with anxiety.

‘Yes, and enough for a cigarette besides. Do you smoke?’

Folly shook her head, doubting whether he would like her quite as well for not having a taste like his.

‘That’s a good girl; I was hoping for that answer. Now for the light.’

Folly’s mind was relieved, her eyes twinkled with satisfaction, and she hastened to wait upon him with childish eagerness.

During the evening the physician had called and consulted with Dr. Chambers on John Morrison’s case. Vane had intended to tell Folly all they had said to him upon the subject, but seeing the happiness in her face he changed his mind.

‘Poor child!’ said he to himself, ‘her gleams of sunshine are not too frequent. The shadow shall not fall upon her to-night.’

So they sat opposite each other, he talking little, she less; but well content both—he with his pipe and sweet reflections, she with the mere consciousness of sitting there near him.



CHAPTER VII.

QUESTION AND ANSWER.

MISS CLIP was in trouble : ten had struck, and Mr. Vane still obstinately refused to eat and drink, waiting to breakfast with Folly, and forbidding the anxious woman to awake her mistress. It was nothing to Miss Clip that she herself still fasted ; she was not a man—a distinction which will be appreciated by those who have remarked how a mother neglects her daughters to wait upon her sons ; how a wife cuts herself down to the bare necessities of life that her husband may enjoy its luxuries ; how, in short, the practice of all women contravenes the theory that their sex is the frailer and more delicate.

Several times Miss Clip had been into

Folly's bedroom to see if she were yet awake, and each time found her aggravatingly sound asleep. The good woman would not for the world have broken Mr. Vane's instructions in a direct manner, but to produce the same effect indirectly was justifiable enough to her Jesuitical mind. So on one occasion she found it necessary to set the room in order, on another to open and close a wardrobe with a particularly noisy lock, and on a third to hum a tune. But Folly slept through it all—poor child! she had kept her vigils for many weary nights before laying her cheek, in drowsy happiness, upon this pillow—and showed no sign of waking. At length, when Miss Clip came into the room for the fourth time, she was like to lose all patience. Folly was actually snoring. It is improper, perhaps, for heroines to snore—it is certainly considered unlady-like; but Folly's head had slipped off the pillow, and she could not help it. There she lay, with her pretty white throat rounded, her head thrown back, her mouth wide open, displaying her white teeth and little red tongue, the indented tip of her white nose tilted in the air, and making the most unmusical sounds a girl can make.

It was but an act of mercy on Miss Clip's part to raise Folly's head upon the pillow and draw the tumbled hair back from her rosy cheek, but it effectually broke her slumber.

'How's father?' she asked, opening her great eyes.

'Better, miss. He's awake, and have been some time.'

'What's o'clock?'

'Nearly five-and-twenty minutes past ten, miss.'

'Oh, you stupid thing, you!' cried Folly, knitting her brows, and raising herself quickly on her elbow. 'It's a shame, it is; and it's all your fault. Why didn't you call me before?'

'Mr. Vane distinctly said I was not to, miss.'

Folly's brows relaxed.

'But you might have woke me all the same, Clip,' she said gently. 'He didn't tell you not to slam the door. Give me my stockings.'

'Lord, miss, you wouldn't a' woke for another hour if I hadn't lifted your head up sharp.'

'You oughtn't to have woke me if he told you not to. Pour out some water.'

Miss Clip obeyed in silence ; there was no arguing with her inconsistent lady.

‘ Did you get something nice for his breakfast ? Folly asked.

‘ Yes, miss ; but he wouldn’t eat it.’

‘ Why ?’ asked Folly, sharply, turning, with her stocking half on.

‘ He won’t begin till you go down—it ain’t likely—*him* !’

With a little cry of delight, and her face beaming with smiles, Folly completed drawing on her stocking in desperate haste. Had she been making a rapid change at the theatre she could not have dressed quicker.

‘ Not that dress, Clip,’ she said, as her dresser laid out the black dress she had been married in ; ‘ I’ll never wear that again. You may have it. Give me anything—it doesn’t matter which—only *do* be quick. Where is he, Clip ?’ she asked, slipping on the dress brought to her.

‘ In the front room, miss.’

Folly drew her rich tresses back tight from her brows, screwed them up in a great knot, thrust a couple of hair-pins through, bending them to make them hold, then left the bedroom without even looking in the glass.

Vane came to the door in response to her light tap.

‘Your father is dozing now. It would be well not to disturb him,’ whispered Vane.

She crept into the room, and glanced at the bed, where her father lay almost as she had seen him the previous night, and then joined Vane, who waited by the door. They went downstairs.

‘He has had a long and good night’s rest,’ Vane said.

‘I am glad of that,’ she answered, thinking of Vane as well as her father.

‘And you also have slept well, I hope. You look much better.’

‘I am a lazy girl, and ashamed of myself for sleeping while you watched. And I’m ashamed to have kept you waiting for breakfast—and I wish you had not waited for me—that is——’ she checked herself, looking up at him—‘that is, I am very much obliged to you for waiting, but it’s too kind of you—indeed it is!’

As they were finishing breakfast, *le géant* came into the room, bringing a couple of letters.

‘Will you allow me to send for a newspaper?’ Vane asked

In giving consent, Folly suddenly hesitated, remembering the advertisements she had caused to be inserted. She coloured and dropped her eyes. Vane saw these signs of confusion, and, without comprehending why, perceived that there must be something in the newspaper she did not wish him to see.

‘It is not necessary,’ said he, taking the letters.

Le géant was leaving the room, when Folly, starting from her seat, called him back.

‘Fetch me all the morning papers,’ she said, giving the boy a sovereign from her purse.

Vane was reading the superscriptions on the letters, when she turned from the door and looked at him.

‘One letter is for me, the other is for Mrs. Roland Aveling,’ he said.

She took her letter and looked at the writing curiously.

‘I can’t read it. Who is it from?’ she asked.

‘I think, by the handwriting, it is from your husband.’

The title, which is usually so grateful to a

young wife's ear, was hateful to Folly. She held the letter idly in her hand, while many thoughts crowded into her mind. She was brought back from a paradise of forgetfulness to a purgatory of remembrance. Her fault was before her represented in that letter. From his kindness towards her it seemed as if Vane had also forgotten and forgiven her fault; and now it must be brought back to his memory and make him regret his lenience. The idea of slipping the letter away, to read in private, and so to evade immediate punishment, did not occur to her, and would probably have been rejected had it occurred.

She was naturally courageous.

'Read it to me,' she said, handing the letter to Vane.

Vane opened the letter.

'This was written at Aveling Hall last night,' he said; and then read:

' "MY DEAR WIFE,

"I consider that the mutual obligations to which we pledged ourselves this morning are unaltered by the revelation you have since made. From my heart I assure you that my love for you is also unaltered,

and I beg you to let me take my place as your husband, in the hope that my constant love may raise a reciprocal feeling in your bosom. I earnestly desire to atone as much as it is in my power for the error of my father. I abandon every consideration but that of your welfare and happiness. Once more I ask you to let me be in reality, as I am in name, your faithful husband,

‘ “ROLAND AVELING.” ’

Richard Vane folded the letter and handed it to Folly without comment.

‘ Thank you for reading it to me,’ she said, quietly.

He opened the second letter, which was from his sister, and read it while Folly gave herself up to silent thought.

‘ It is odd,’ thought Vane, ‘ these two letters coming together—one from Roland, the other from Madge, both mated and unmated. It is Roley’s turn to suffer now. Thank God the boy is not dead to feeling ! That letter of his tells its story—a letter not without its faults, but a good letter for all that. He has awoke from that contemptible lethargy, happily ; and if he does not see the right road clearly, he evidently does not

wish to take the wrong one. Pity it did not occur to him to say yesterday morning all that he wrote in the evening. Well, well, better late than never.' Looking up from Madge's letter, he saw that Folly was still in thought. Continuing his reflections, he said to himself, 'I wonder what is passing through her mind. Clearly she has given up that savage notion of revenge, or she would not hesitate to accept a proposal which would separate father and son, and deal a more cruel blow to that stupid old gentleman than any she has yet aimed at him. What a beautiful soul this girl has—worthy of the beautiful body it dwells in.'

'I want to know what is right,' Folly said, abruptly, clasping her hands tightly. 'I want to know if—if my husband's letter is right.' She forced herself to speak of Roland as her husband.

'I don't quite understand you, Folly. Shall I read the letter again?'

'No, I know every word of it thoroughly: he says the mutual obligations to which we pledged ourselves yesterday morning are unaltered by what followed; that is to say, it doesn't make any difference whether I love him or not; he says as much in the words

that follow. Then he begs me to agree to his returning here, in the hope that I may get to love him in time. Is that good ?

‘Yes, Folly, it is good. You cannot be unmarried, and it is not well for married men and women to live apart. Many people begin their married life with unhappiness, but by practising mutual bearance and forbearance they come at length to be content, and then happy. And so, if you can overcome your repugnance to this man—whose greatest fault, after all, seems to be that he is the son of a man whom you dislike still more—you should consent to his entreaty. Remember, you have wronged Roland, and owe him atonement.’ Noting the expression of perplexity upon Folly’s face, he added, ‘Do you understand me ?’

‘Quite well,’ she replied, her countenance still fixed in earnest thought. Some moments elapsed before she spoke again, then she said, ‘But if I am certain—as certain as I am that my heart beats—that I can never love Roland—could never feel his lips upon my cheek without shame, without wishing that one of us were dead—would it be good to listen to his entreaty ? And if I know that I could never satisfy the hope which leads him to

make this proposal, would it be an atonement to accept it ?

‘Certainly not,’ said Vane ; ‘but you exaggerate your fears, and look at the future as if your prejudice must never diminish.’

‘I am looking at what must come, not at what may happen. Look at the men who sit in the stalls of the theatre and look at the life of their wives. Is that the state of content you would have us hope to reach ? That might be possible to some ; it is not possible to me.’

‘Thank God !’ Vane murmured, fervently.

‘I should become a devil, or—or kill myself, if I were compelled to live with a man who made me a thing to deceive—a thing for him to jest about with his companions—a troublesome, useless, valueless thing, and nothing more.’

‘Heaven forbid that you should be united to such a man !’

‘And would Roland Aveling be better than other men with a wife who did not love him at home and temptations abroad ? Oh no !’

‘I see no reason why his wife, when she outlives her present prejudice, should not love him. He is handsome, and young, and goodnatured, and—— !’

‘Stop! Is it for such reasons I love my father? For once you are unjust. It is cruel to class me with silly fools who love like that. That is not love at all—it is something vile that takes a holy name. Whatever my faults are, I have done nothing to justify you in thinking me so bad as that.’

The exaggerated view of the future taken by Folly had seemed to Vane the natural outgrowth of strong prejudice, but he was completely at a loss to understand the extravagant import she found in his simple suggestion.

‘My dear Folly,’ he said, ‘you attach a serious meaning to my words which I did not intend them to convey. Life itself is serious and grave, but it has its light and pleasant sides. The love of young people comes at first sight, and is not unworthy because the senses are delighted. A man is not less lovable because he is young and good looking and agreeable.’

‘I have seen enough of such men,’ Folly said, impatiently, with a frown for the flattering young gentlemen of the *coulisses*.

‘The very best of men and women are attracted by personal beauty, which is the symbol of perfection, and frequently accom-

panies the more lasting loveliness of a sweet and truthful soul.'

Folly looked at Vane's face, as if she were comparing it with his statement; then she shook her head gravely and dropped her eyes.

Vane laughed to himself at the unintended satire of this commentary. Once, at college, when he had advanced his theory of the union of physical with moral beauty, Roland had turned upon him, with the curtness of a privileged friend, saying, 'Then you must be a precious bad lot, Vane.'

'You have feelings and senses in common with other women,' Vane went on to say, 'and when the present agitation of your mind is abated, you will share their sentiments.'

Again Folly shook her head, saying, in a low voice :

'You don't understand. How can you?—you have never loved.'

The words and the tone in which they were spoken carried a revelation to Vane.

'And you, Folly?' he asked, earnestly.

Folly buried her burning face in her hands.

'Is it,' continued Vane, gently, 'that you too have loved and lost, and so feel that you

can never love Roland as you have loved another, and as you should love him? Can you tell me?

‘No, no,’ she replied; ‘I cannot tell you. You do not understand it all.’

Vane did not probe into the secret of that aching heart; he only wondered what kind of a man it was that had earned the reward of her love, and what he had done to deserve so much. Was he dead? Clearly he had not been a handsome or young lover—possibly such another unshapely fellow as himself, only with some prevailing gift that made him adorable to the beautiful young girl. He might have been a musician, who had stirred the fibres of her soul with sound. One thing was indubitable, the unknown lover had deserved the love bestowed.

‘And if I never could love Roland,’ Folly said, speaking slowly and with agitation, ‘for the reason you mentioned—because I have given my whole heart to one, and have no love to give to him—then what answer should I send to his letter?’

Vane pulled his straggling beard thoughtfully.

Folly, looking at him, said to herself: ‘Whatever he does is good and for the best.’

She rose from her seat, leaving her question unanswered, and, going to the side table on which lay the writing materials used by Vane the night before, she picked up a sheet of paper and a pen. Laying them before Vane, she said :

‘Write the answer you would have me make on that paper, and send it to my husband.’

‘No, Folly,’ he said, firmly. ‘This is a question on which I find I cannot even offer you my advice. The answer must come from you. Take time to consider, and let your conscience guide you.’

‘I have considered, and my conscience speaks. I cannot write. Take the pen and put down these words : “Folly is sorry, and if she could, would undo what she has done. She never loved you, and it is not possible that she should ; and so she prays Heaven she may never see you again.”’

She waited until Vane had written the words, then she said :

‘Must I sign it ?’

‘No, that is not necessary,’ Vane answered, looking at the brief note doubtfully.

‘Then you will put it in an envelope and send it ?’

‘I will put it in an envelope, but I don’t think we will send it for a day or two.’

‘I shall not alter. But you can delay sending the answer until you are certain.’

Vane put the letter in his pocket, hoping that she would alter. He could not help thinking that she had decided under the influences of emotions raised by a painful memory of some one she had loved. If he were dead, then possibly her remembrance would in time die also, he argued.



CHAPTER VIII.

FOLLY'S DISGRACE.

‘**A**ND now for the other thing!’ said Folly, alluding to a second difficulty which must be faced.

During the conversation outlined in the foregoing chapter, *le géant* had brought the papers, and, by Folly’s instructions, laid them, with the change of her sovereign, on a chair by the door. She now fetched them.

‘You don’t expect me to read all these papers, Folly!’ said Vane, looking at the pile she laid on the table before him.

‘No; but I want you to see just what a bad girl I am,’ she replied, opening a paper. She found the column in which her name was repeated from top to bottom.

‘What does that say?’ she asked, putting the paper in Vane’s hand.

‘“Folly (Mrs. Roland Aveling) the queen of burlesque, will sing her new song “*chic!*”’ Vane said, reading the first advertisement in the column that met his eye.

‘There’s another,’ said Folly, thrusting a second paper into his hand, in which the same list was displayed. ‘It’s in all of them.’ She turned the papers over quickly, exposing the proofs of her vengeful spirit one after the other, with stern resolution to spare nothing.

Despite the ludicrous side to this picture, Richard Vane looked at them with becoming gravity.

‘No one is responsible but me,’ Folly said, still opening the papers. ‘I told Clip what to write, and paid the prompter, who is a copyist and writes out all the parts, to set them out right and get them in.’

Vane made no remark, but continued to view the columns as they came.

‘But that’s not all. Where are the marriages in a paper?’

Vane found the announcements.

‘Do you see my name there?’ Folly asked.

‘Yes, here it is;’ and Vane read the advertisement as it appeared in the *Times*.

‘Ah, I’m glad it’s no worse!’ remarked Folly, with a sigh of relief. ‘I told Clip to write after “Folly,” “born in Chertsey workhouse, and daughter of John Morrison, of Sandy Lane, sent to prison by Sir Andrew Aveling,”—but I suppose the papers wouldn’t put that in.’

‘I should think not,’ replied Vane, drily.

Folly seated herself, and waited for her scolding.

‘How many times are these announcements to appear?’ Vane asked, turning the paper to get at the foreign intelligence.

‘Thirty. They cost an awful lot, and they were paid for out of Sir Andrew’s money.’

Vane tried to fix his attention very firmly upon the paper.

‘I told Roland I wanted the money for a *souvenir de mariage*, and he gave me the cheque!’

Folly was determined to mitigate her fault in no particular.

‘Ah! Well, now, Folly, I should like to read my paper quietly for half an hour,’ said Vane, as if he had been listening to the most perfectly immaterial matter.

This act of Folly’s called for rebuke, but it appeared to Vane so childish in comparison

with the greater events of her life, that he could think of no other punishment than such as might be administered to a child for spitefulness.

Folly understood that she was dismissed from the room, and she rose to go as Vane, moving to the chair by the fire, pulled out his pipe and tobacco-pouch. She stood still, looking at him for a moment, hoping he would turn his face to her and nod ; but he did not take any notice of her ; he filled his pipe with solemn gravity.

‘ Oh, if he would only ask me for a spill,’ thought Folly. When the pipe was filled, he took a vesta from his pocket, lit his pipe, and sank back to read the paper. He never looked at her, except when her back was turned, and she was walking towards the door slowly, with her head bent in desolation and grief. She closed the door gently behind her.

Slight as the incident was, it touched Vane’s heart, impressing him with the youthfulness of the little sufferer. It was so like a poor child sinning and sorrowing. It was with difficulty he overcame the temptation to call her back and lighten the heart that had so much to bear.

‘No, no ; the lesson must be taught. It is good for her,’ he said to himself.

So Folly, waiting outside the door for the voice that should recall her, heard none.

‘He despises me for my mean vengeance ; I am too contemptible to be scolded. He, too, can be merciless and hard-hearted !’ she said. But she did not believe what she said to herself ; in her heart he was faultless still : it was only she who did wicked and unkind things. Folly very rarely cried ; but she felt now as if she would like to cry, and cry till he came to comfort her. Repressing this inclination, she went to her father’s room. He was still dozing, and only that horrid Smith was in the room.

The stout young man came to her smiling, and whispered :

‘I’ve showed him the present—my bedstead, you know, that I chopped up.’

Folly heard this with stony indifference in her face.

‘And he says, “That’s the style, Smith,” he says. “You’ve done the best half-hour’s work you ever did in your life,” says he.’

‘I suppose I ought to like this Smith, as he does, but I can’t,’ thought Folly ; and so, without any false pretences, she left him.

‘What have I done for him?’ she asked herself, despondingly. ‘What can I do in gratitude?—nothing. I can’t chop up anything.’ She wandered into the kitchen, where she found Miss Clip peeling potatoes. ‘I want you to go out, Clip,’ said she.

‘Fur, miss?’

‘You must go and find Biggle.’

‘The prompter, miss? Why, he live in Doory Lane.’

‘No matter. You must go and tell him to take all those advertisements out of the papers. They are never to come out any more.’

‘Wouldn’t this afternoon do, miss?’ suggested Clip, in her blindest, most persuasive tone. ‘This afternoon, directly after lunch, miss; because I’m going to prepare some fried pork sausages and mashed potatoes for him at lunch, miss?’

‘I’ll peel the potatoes for him’—every one referred by this indefinite pronoun to Richard Vane—‘and you go at once, and there’s a sovereign,’ cried Folly, putting down the money and taking the knife out of Miss Clip’s hand. At the sight of the gold Miss Clip yielded, and Folly, repeating her instructions, closed the door behind her.

Then with alacrity she turned to the task of peeling potatoes for 'him.' The first thing was to take all that Miss Clip had peeled and throw them behind the fire ; then, carrying the basket of tubers to the light, she carefully selected the finest she could find ; after that she fetched a basin of clean water, set it on the table, and, having arranged everything to hand, seated herself on the table beside the basin, and went to work. How carefully she gouged out the eyes of those potatoes, and removed each tiny speck from their surface, is needless to tell.

It afforded her relief from the depressing feeling of uselessness, this occupation ; and the thoughts that passed through her mind, though sad, were less unhappy. But she could not forget her disgrace, and once or twice a sigh fluttered up from her heart. Thinking what a troublesome little person she was, she looked with sad and wistful widely-opened eyes at the potato under her hand, her lips moving as if she were addressing it upon the subject of her distress.

Sitting there, with her pretty feet crossed, bending gracefully to the simple occupation, she looked like the quaint fancy of an artist.

When the work was done, and the potatoes lay soiless in the water, she wiped her hands hurriedly and ran up to the room where she had left Vane. She tapped at the door, her heart beating quickly.

‘Come in,’ cried Vane.

She crossed the room with a quick step, and eyes that looked in anxious hope at Vane. She saw kindness gleaming in his face, but would not take advantage of it to mitigate her own penitence. Coming to the side of his chair, she sank down beside it, resting her hands on the arm, and looking up piteously into his face.

‘I am very sorry,’ she said. ‘I have been a neglected child; but I want to be ever so good, and I will if I can.’

He put his hand upon her head, as a father might, looking into her face through the tears that sprang into his eyes.

‘It is not for me to accuse or to pardon,’ he said, tenderly; ‘but be assured, my child, that your sins are forgiven you.’

It seemed as if he spoke indeed with divine authority, and Folly bowed her head in the presence of the spirit of mercy which we call God.

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‘And now, Folly, I can smoke happily. Bring me a light.’

He took the pipe from the chimney-piece, where he had laid it unsmoked. Folly looked at it for a moment in silence, then :

‘Why did it go out?’ she asked, softly.

‘Because you did not light it, I suspect.’

With the bird-like cry of joy that escaped her in her moments of happiness, she tore a slip from an offending newspaper, and brought it alight to Vane.

She was a negligent, careless girl, and had never thought of protecting herself from the soiling effects of potato peeling, consequently her dress, an elaborate affair of plum-coloured satin and velvet, was all dabbled with water.

As she stood before Vane this state of things was visible to him.

‘Why, Folly,’ he exclaimed, ‘you’re all wet! What on earth have you been doing?’

‘Peeling potatoes,’ she answered.



CHAPTER IX.

JOHN MORRISON FALLS ASLEEP.

THE physician had said to Richard Vane, 'John Morrison is past my help. I cannot improve upon the prescription of Chambers, who seems a particularly clever and earnest young man, and whom I shall do my best to advance in the profession. As I have said, the patient's recovery is impossible; a few days must terminate his existence. But for a marvellously strong constitution he must have died in the paroxysms which, Dr. Chambers informs me, he has gone through. It is, indeed, quite phenomenal that he should recover from the form of dementia which is usually the final and fatal development of this disease. I can only attribute it to the

wonderful power I perceive you exercise over his mind ;' and in reply to Vane's question had added, ' It is possible the delirium may return if your influence is withdrawn ; under it he will probably pass away quite happily.'

The main fact of this statement Vane broke to Folly, taking advantage of a moment when she seemed best able to bear it.

' Thank Heaven he has lived long enough to die in peace, poor dear !' said Folly, calmly.

That he should die in peace was a desire that Vane did his utmost to realise, and to this end exerted himself to disabuse John Morrison's mind of error. Absolute peace was impossible, he considered, while doubt lingered in the mind—confidence and peace being inseparable. If the old man awoke in Vane's absence he showed anxiety, and hailed his coming with evident relief. Vane, seeing this, one morning seated himself on the bed, still holding the withered hand Morrison had eagerly extended, and said :

' John, I have told you that you are no longer pursued ; do not you believe me ?'

' Yes, master, yes. I believe it, for you have said it, but——' the old man paused, fumbling at his chin with trembling fingers.

' Well ?'

‘I want to ask a question, but I don’t dare to, for fear of your answer; for if it is you’ll say it is, no matter what comes of it.’

‘Nothing ill can come from the truth, John. It is better to know that the worst has happened than to fear that it may come.’

‘So it is. I know that well enough.’

‘Then come, out with your question; and, be the answer bad or good, you shall know it.’

The old man tried to speak, lost courage, and shook his head. Vane held his hand and waited patiently. After a while John Morrison got out the words in a whisper :

‘I want to know whether I’m likely, when I get well enough to go about again, to—to stumble against the——’ He stopped, clapping his disengaged hand over his mouth and shaking his head.

‘You want to know whether you should meet the dead hare?’ Vane said.

The old man nodded his head, and then looked in terror round the room, to see if the words had raised the dreaded image of his diseased imagination.

‘Look at me,’ said Vane, firmly.

‘Yes, master, yes,’ murmured John Morrison, his eyes yielding to the powerful will of Richard Vane.

‘This that I tell you is the truth : the dead hare that brought misfortunes to you is no more. Long since it returned to soil, and has given life, perhaps, to a thousand beautiful flowers.’

‘Master, master!’ cried the old man, clasping Vane’s hand and caressing it. ‘Tell me more truth—tell me more!’

‘I want you to know the truth, because it is from a little error that your great troubles have arisen. You believe that you were punished for taking that dead hare in wilful cruelty. That was a mistake, John.’

‘A mistake, master!—how? Did I steal the hare?’

‘No.’

‘Did not I go to prison?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did not my wife die in cruel solitude, and my children get scattered and lost?’

‘Too true.’

‘Then, was not this through the cruelty of Sir Andrew in sending me to prison when I did not deserve it?’

‘No.’ Vane waited a minute, while the word sank into the old man’s intelligence, then continued: ‘I say Sir Andrew was guiltless of such wilful cruelty. He thought

you were guilty, and had he foreseen all the terrible consequences of your imprisonment, he would still have been bound to send you away, believing you guilty. Sir Andrew is not a perfect man; he is liable to be deceived; he has not the wisdom to detect false from true evidence; he is not fit to be a judge; but he is innocent of malicious cruelty. He may have been mistaken in what he considered it was his duty to do, but the wrong lies with the men who put power into the hands of him who could not use it wisely. He is innocent: the people who made him their instrument are criminal.'

John Morrison listened in mute bewilderment.

Folly, sitting by the opposite side of the bed, heard and learnt. The reasoning, which perplexed the weak understanding of her father, was clear to her.

'This is too much for you to comprehend. You must trust to my knowledge of right and wrong to discern the truth, and 'believe in the simple fact that I tell you,' Vane said.

'Tell me what I shall believe.'

'That Sir Andrew Aveling is guiltless of the misfortunes which have fallen so heavily upon you—believe that.'

With the implicit faith which the simple at all times have placed in the word of the highest—of the one whom they recognise as worthy and to be trusted—an Odin, a Christ, a Mohammed—John Morrison accepted the statement of Richard Vane.

He lay down upon his pillow, repeating the words he had heard, telling the facts over and over again in numerical succession upon his fingers—the persecution ended—the hare no more—Andrew Aveling innocent.

Some time after this he said to Vane :

‘Master, I have cursed Sir Andrew Aveling over and over again. On my knees calling God to blast him and his : if he was innocent, I am guilty.’

‘God punishes as He thinks fit—not as a man in his ignorance directs. You are innocent, John.’

The old man gave a sigh of relief. Presently he said :

‘Where’s Folly?’

‘Here, father,’ answered the girl, coming to his side.

‘Folly dear, you must have heard a many things fall from my lips, when I knew no better, as wasn’t fit for you to hear—a many

things as might mislead you. I wish 'em unsaid, dear; I wish 'em unsaid.'

'You can unsay 'em now, daddy dear.'

'I'm on'y fit to be guided myself. Ask him to tell you what is good to do, dear, and go you and do it. Trust him.'

She pressed his hand and nodded.

'A sweet pretty dear you are, Folly; lighter and more fairylike 'an your mother ever were, but with her good face on you, and the little mole by your eye, too. Lord! I call to mind how she looked a-nursin' her first little 'ne, poor soul!' He fell into a reverie, shutting his eyes—to look back into the past and onwards to the future, perhaps. When he opened his eyes again, he said: 'Master, I've been a bad lot. I don't know nothing about Noah, and Adam and Eve, and Holy Ghostes and things. Do that make any difference respectin' the future?'

'None, I believe, John.'

'I didn't ought to be baptized, nor nothing, in case I don't get better?'

'Not unless you feel it would be right.'

'No, master; I don't seem to want it myself, not knowing what it all means, and if you say it ain't necessary, why, I'd as lieve go wi'out it.'

He went to sleep soon after.

This was on Sunday night, about ten o'clock. The old man had slept much lately and shown perfect composure. Vane foresaw that the end was not far distant.

Folly was silent and thoughtful. She followed Vane and kept by his side wherever he went; the slightest action, the most trifling word of his she seemed to grasp at with the eagerness of an exile in catching the last sounds and glimpses of fatherland.

At half-past ten she offered to leave him, but he bade her stay, and noticed the joyful eagerness with which she accepted. He told her the story of Shakespeare's 'Winter's Tale.' About eleven the bed-clothes moved.

'Master,' said the thin voice of the old man, 'are you awake?'

Vane took Folly to the bedside.

'I've had the comferablest sleep; an' I thought I shouldn't wake again; but somehow I seemed to know as I hadn't said "Good-night," so I woked up.'

'Have you been dreaming, John?' asked Vane.

'No, master; no dreams, only a comferable kind of forgettin' like.'

He crossed his hands placidly as he spoke, calling to Vane's mind a beautiful passage in the Psalms.

'Folly dear, you look wondrous grave, considerin' how right and nice everything is come at last.'

She smiled, drawing nearer to him, and he smoothed her soft hair with his crinkled hand. Suddenly he put his hand under the pillow and brought out the pipe which Vane had given him.

'I feel so easy and nice,' he said, in his piping tone; 'jest like having a draw at the pipe. Would it do me any harm, master?'

'You can try, and put it away if it hurts you.'

The old man nodded cheerfully, drew out the well-beloved pipe, and, when Folly had lit it for him, took two or three light whiffs with evident satisfaction.

'Where's Mr. Smith?' he asked, as he took the pipe from his lips.

'Gone home to see his wife and children.'

He looked at the pipe admiringly, and touching up the silver mounting with the coverlet, he said:

'Would you mind my giving this pipe away, master?'

‘No, John. I gave it you; do as you please with it.’

‘Mr. Smith’s been very kind to me lately, and I should like to give it to him, for,’ said he, looking up with a little smile on his face, and speaking in the calmest, lowest little voice, ‘I don’t think I shall smoke it no more.’

Vane nodded kindly.

‘I’ll pop him under my pillow till the morning,’ said the old fellow, lying down and slipping the pipe under the pillow. ‘And now I’ll bid you “Good-night.”’

Folly laid her head beside his, drawing his cheek to her lips. Then she rose and left the room.

‘Good-night, dear master,’ said he, pressing Vane’s hand.

‘Good-night, John; God bless you!’

The old man smiled feebly in reply, and his eyes closed for ever, his time of rest being come.



CHAPTER X.

FOLLY'S MISSION.

FOLLY, leaving her father's bedroom, knew she should see him alive no more. She walked up to her room slowly, like one in fatigue. But her heart had lost its lightness, not her feet their nimbleness.

She closed her door and locked it, then seated herself upon the bed. There she sat in the chill night without light or companion, mourning not for her father, but for herself.

She was to be pitied more than he. To leave a world of sorrow and rest in happy forgetfulness, that is happiness; but to lose a dearest friend and live remembering the happiness that cannot be recalled, that is indeed misery. She had to prepare for a

living death, and future space and time seemed all epitomised in the silence, the cold, the darkness, and the solitude in which she now sat. Her mood prevented her seeing the possibility of dawning light. She saw only the darkness closing in upon her.

‘I shall be quite alone, just as I am now,’ she thought. ‘My father will die and be buried, and Richard Vane will leave me. I have not a single friend in the world besides. I cannot live as I have lived, cheating myself, like a little fool. I know that I am ignorant and helpless. He said I was one of the world’s neglected children, and it is so. And I have done wrong—been stupid and silly, and I must suffer. But it is hard to be punished so cruelly. I cannot hope to be like him; it must be my lot to amuse an idle crowd, nothing more. To do good, to have the unhappy bless me from the darkness, as I bless him, that is not for me, but for a better woman, such as his sister must be.’

This was the theme round which her thoughts revolved, taking a hundred phases, none brighter than the rest.

She had sat thus for half an hour when Miss Clip knocked at the door, and asked if she could be of any service.

‘No,’ answered Folly. ‘Go to bed.’

Her humility was not of a kind to make her indulgent to those who presumably were her equals; on the contrary, she felt justified in hating them by the fact that she hated herself. For poor Miss Clip, the friend who had faithfully served her, she felt the profoundest contempt and dislike at this moment. It was not logical, it was not in accordance with the broad Christianity of the man whose every movement she revered, but—it was natural.

She dismissed Miss Clip from her thoughts as summarily as she had sent her from the door, and returned once more to her selfish contemplations.

The hour grew late, but it did not occur to her that she should undress and go to bed; had the idea presented itself she would have rejected it, for how could she systematically prepare herself to forget that her father was dying, and that Vane would soon after leave her for ever?

It was after midnight when she opened her door silently and slipped downstairs to the room where were all that she held dear. She listened, standing with her ear to the door, and heard not a sound. But it gave

her happiness to know that they were near. So she sat down upon the floor by the door, resting her back against the jamb, and folded her hands in her lap with a little sigh of content.

About two o'clock Vane, sitting by the fire, reading Thackeray, heard a movement behind him, and thinking it came from the bed he closed his book and crossed to John Morrison's side. The old man lay quite still and quiet—just as he had composed himself on first lying down. One hand lay upon the coverlet; he was unconscious of Vane's touch. The hand was chill, but not cold, and the pulse, though feeble, was yet perceptible. Vane rearranged the coverlet, and returned to his chair; but he did not open his book again. Folly engaged his mind in speculation. Was she asleep, or still awake, poor child? He knew her sufficiently to be aware that she would not go to bed in an ordinary way. He had dismissed her, hoping that in solitude her overcharged heart would find relief in tears, and expecting that afterwards she would return to him. With this anticipation he had refrained from lying down. Perhaps she had cried herself to sleep—this was probable; but if not, she

must be awake and unhappy. Compassion impelled him to find out if this last conjecture were the right one. Opening the door he stopped short in astonishment, for, under the light of the lamp he carried in his hand, he found Folly upon the floor, with her hands between her cheek and the wall, sleeping.

Vane took the lamp back to the table beside his chair, and then, returning to the door, knelt beside Folly, not knowing exactly what to do with the sleeping girl. He could not leave her there, yet it seemed equally cruel to wake her. As he knelt, looking in her beautiful face, perplexity giving place to admiration, she moved, and opened her large eyes dreamily. It may have been only like a continuation of her dream to see him there, for she showed no sign of astonishment—only a sweet smile stole over her face.

She took her hands from the wall and raised herself, and, becoming conscious that she no longer slept, her eyes grew anxious.

‘You won’t send me away?’ she said, in a low voice.

‘No, no,’ he replied, rising, and helping her to rise; ‘but why did you come here and not let me know?’

‘I never thought of disturbing you.’

He led her into the room and closed the door.

‘Your father still sleeps quite peacefully,’ he said, taking her to the bedside.

‘He is happy,’ she said.

Vane caught the tone of envying sadness in which she spoke, and did not reply.

‘He is going to see all the faces that he loved long ago ; is it not so ?’ she asked.

‘It is pleasant to think so.’

‘Oh, it must be so, or there is no mercy in Heaven.’

As she spoke she laid her hand upon Vane’s arm, looking up into his face with earnest thoughtfulness, as if seeking there for confirmation of the hope that was nearest her heart.

It was no moment for philosophy—for the expression of that chilling doubt which reason feels in regarding a subject beyond its comprehension.

‘Let us hope so,’ Vane said, bowing his head, for it was a prayer that rose from his heart.

He would have given all the world to return the anxious questioning of her eyes with a positive assurance, but he could not speak honestly of that which no man knoweth, and

all the world was not so dear to him as truth.

He left the bedside, drew another chair to the fire, and made Folly take his own.

She took no notice of this arrangement; her mind was still engrossed in the subject she had opened.

‘Heaven is merciful?’ she asked, leaning forwards towards Vane and fixing him with her eyes.

‘Yes, Folly.’

‘Then we shall find those that we have lost, else we should not be so cruelly parted.’

‘The young and old must part. It is not in nature that we should all grow old together,’ answered Vane, taking Folly and her father as the case in point; ‘the knowledge that this must be so should moderate our grief.’ He drew his chair nearer and took her hand in his, and looking towards the bed, said, ‘Think, Folly, that this could not be otherwise.’

‘Yes; yes,’ Folly said softly, dropping her eyes, and resting them upon the large hand which held hers so gently.

She knew to whom he referred, and agreed with his conclusion; but she had been thinking of a separation which was to be, not

through disparity of years, and of a case which might have been otherwise.

‘Heaven is merciful,’ she said, ‘and yet we outlive our happiness.’ Again she raised her eyes to his face, and then asked : ‘Why may we not die at our happiest moment?’

‘We are not born merely to be happy, Folly. We are something higher than the butterflies who come and go with the flowers and sunshine. Our very sorrows serve a good and wise purpose, though we may not have the wisdom to fathom it. Look at this coal that burns, giving us warmth and light; thousands of years before men were born to use it, the ferns and palms that form it flourished and grew. None was there to know the purpose of its growth and change save Heaven who provides for all. Who shall say that future happiness may not spring from your present sorrows? Do not our very errors serve to make us wise? Then may not your unhappiness produce future joys?’

‘Joys!—for me?’

‘For you; and not alone for you. Thousands are waiting for your help, and in helping them you will give joy and find it. It is in your power to do good—to raise up those

who have fallen, and assist the struggling. Hundreds of women have not the faculty that you have for doing good—women who have not one unselfish thought, who are born moths, live moths, and, having fluttered out their brief summer of pleasure, die moths ; but for you there is a higher life.’

‘ I am nothing but a dancer.’

‘ One may be almost what one will.’

Folly looked in the fire gravely, and with that movement of the hand which usually accompanied her words, said :

‘ It would be no use. I could give up the stage for a month, but I should go back to it and dance worse than ever after.’

Vane smiled.

‘ It is not necessary to leave the stage to be useful—quite otherwise,’ he said. ‘ It is useful and good to dance and sing to amuse people and lighten their hours. That is a good work. I have seen you upon the stage, and derived from your performance something more than simple amusement ; but if it were that you only amused, still you would be doing good. It is not necessary to wear a garb of sanctity and make a profession of charity to be charitable, nor to renounce all pleasure to lessen pain ; that would be to add

one more to the number of the unfortunate, and there are enough without.'

Folly gave a sigh of relief. She had entertained an idea that for a woman to be good she must walk slowly, wear something unbecoming, and smile as seldom as possible. She was still uncertain as to where a woman should begin her work. Black people required a great deal of help, she knew, having had the terrors in store for them in the next world explained to her by a respectable gentleman wearing a white tie and carrying a brass-bound money-box ; but where might negroes be found by one having to attend theatrical representations at the Levity every night ? One came occasionally into the Lambeth Road, but as he devoted his life to grinding a barrel-organ, and never ground anything but slow and melancholy sacred melodies, it was not to be supposed that he required much assistance beyond the encouraging copper.

'I suppose there are a great many people wanting help—everywhere almost ?' she said.

'Yes, they are not difficult to find,' Vane answered.

'And what can I do ?'

'That which comes to your hand. Do

whatever your heart prompts you to do. You need no direction. The love you have shown for your father tells that. Think that you are the sister of all men and women, and then you can do them nothing but that which is good. Dance to them, sing to them, amuse them ; and if by chance you can comfort one, or put another in the way of being better, let no consideration check you.'

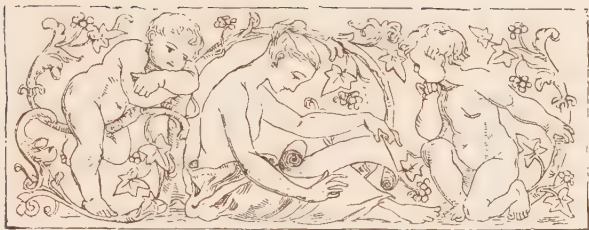
Folly found consolation in listening to the simple doctrine of Richard Vane. He imposed no arduous task, and took the thorns from the path of duty ; and if—oh, if he would only sometimes hold out a hand to guide her when she strayed, how happy her course would be !

' You will see me sometimes, after——' she, faltering, asked.

' Often, I trust,' he answered.

She smiled, leaning back in her chair, and taking her eyes from his face to the fire. He still held her hand. When he would have taken his away she clipped it, looking up side-long at him with a little shrug of entreaty. Soon after her eyes grew languid and closed, and she fell asleep with her hand in his.

As calmly, as silently, the life passed away from John Morrison's body.



CHAPTER XI.

FOLLY TAKES OFF HER WEDDING-RING.

TO prevent her from brooding over her loss, and to prepare her for his own departure, Richard Vane engaged Folly's attention upon the immediate affairs in which he hoped to render her assistance. When the day for John Morrison's funeral had been fixed, he said to her :

‘Have you thought of what you shall do after, Folly?’

‘No,’ she replied, carelessly.

‘Shall we think about the subject now?’

‘Why? The day will come too soon. Why should I think of my solitude before it comes?’

‘There are difficulties, and I may be able to help you.’

‘You are not going to leave me until—then?’ she said quickly, in a tone of alarm.

‘I shall come and see you every day; but there is no wisdom in putting off these considerations; troubles don’t grow less by deferring them.’

‘What troubles do you mean?’

‘To begin with, you have to settle where you will live.’

‘That is nothing,’ she said, attempting to smile. ‘It does not matter where I live. I shall not stop here nor return to Lambeth. Clip and I can find a couple of rooms in an hour, somewhere near the theatre. There will be nothing to prevent Clip being my dresser then, and we can walk together to and from the theatre.’

‘What shall you do with this house?’

‘I hardly know. At first I thought I would set fire to it, and burn it all down; then I determined to shut it up, and send the key to Roland; but now I have resolved to do neither the one nor the other. I will do nothing more to give him pain, if I can help it.’ She spoke in a voice of pity, and paused. Then, turning to Vane, she said, imploringly, ‘Do not mistrust me!’

‘That is impossible, Folly. I know you

feel for him. Look at this.' He took a letter from his pocket. 'It is your answer to Roland—not sent yet. I have kept it back, hoping that out of pity love may spring up for the man you have injured.'

'Love for him! Oh no—no—no!' Folly exclaimed passionately, raising her hands as if to repulse the image that came before her mind. 'It is a sin to think of loving him. You would not hint the subject to me if you knew all. What must I tell you to make you believe that I cannot love him, and may not?'

'You led me to believe that you loved another; but if, as I concluded, he is no more, a second love may rise when the memory of the first fades away.'

'It will not fade away,' she cried. Then, the red blood rushing to her face, she added: 'If I tell you that he lives, will you still think it possible that I may love Roland, or must I tell you all?'

'It is enough. Keep the secret in your faithful heart, poor child! The letter shall go.'

'Write again at the bottom of the letter, "Folly is still sorry, and suffers for her fault."'

Her eyes fell to the ground, and for a mo-

ment her heart gave way before the contemplation of her own grief; then she snatched up an illustrated paper from the table, and opening it, said, huskily :

‘Go on ; let us talk of the other troubles.’

A single tear plashed upon the paper she bent over—a single tear, no more, to relieve the aching fulness of her heart, and then she summoned up fortitude, and looked Vane in the face.

‘I have had a letter from Sir Andrew Aveling, which also must be answered. Shall I read his letter to you?’

‘No. What does he want?’

‘He wishes to make what atonement is in his power for the injury he has done. He expresses great regret, and makes an offer which I dare say is as liberal as any that could enter his imagination.’

‘What does he offer?’

‘He begs you to accept a pecuniary testimony of his feeling, and encloses a—a cheque, which you are at liberty to fill up as you please, and make use of.’

Folly laughed. It seemed to her such an odd way of expressing regret.

‘I suppose he doesn’t know any better,’ she said, recollecting the argument urged

in extenuation of Sir Andrew's graver offence.

‘He means well, I believe,’ Vane answered.

‘Then he would like me to accept it?’

‘Yes.’

‘How much is it worth?’

‘As much as you choose. If you write ten or twenty thousand pounds upon it, I have no doubt it will be paid. There is the paper.’

Folly took the cheque and looked at it with an amused smile; then, rising from her chair and folding it, she said:

‘Write and tell him I will use the cheque some day.’ She crossed to the mantelpiece, and stuck the cheque between the glass and the frame of the mirror upon it.

‘That’s done; now, what else?’ asked she, returning to her chair.

‘I want to know about your friends, Folly.’

‘Friends?—I have you.’ All the lovable people in the world seemed to her comprehended in him.

‘But besides me. Who is there that you may make your companion? I do not know what my occupation may be, or where it may take me; and it is well to have two strings to your bow. You must meet many people

at the theatre—many must be pleasant, one would think.’

‘No,’ she answered ; ‘there is no one there that I like. The women are jealous of me, and the men are selfish and stupid. Esperenza is in Paris. There’s nobody I care for, nobody who cares for me, except old Clip ; she’ll stay with me while I have any money.’

After a minute’s grave reflection, Vane asked :

‘Would you like to know my sister?’

‘Your sister Margaret!’ Folly’s eyes widened in astonishment. It seemed impossible that Madge should ever forgive her.

‘She is in London, and has written asking if she can help you.’

‘Tell me about your sister,’ said Folly, quietly. ‘What is she like?’

‘She is a little taller than you ; slighter, fairer, and five or six years older ; more like a lily than a rose.’

‘And she is quite faultless, I dare say?’

‘I’m afraid not,’ answered Vane, laughing. ‘I own I can’t find anything to dislike in her ; but then it is almost as difficult to see one’s own faults as those of the people who are dear to us. I recollect her saying once that

she found it hard work to be good ; now that wouldn't be the case if she were perfect. I remember, too, she had the reputation for being idle ; and I know she's fond of talking about people's faults behind their backs ; but that's a family weakness, you see, for here am I, who began by saying I saw nothing in her to dislike, telling that she has a fault which I ought to condemn.'

Folly did not respond to the pleasantry. Her mind was occupied with the more serious part of the subject.

'Did she love Ronald very much?' she asked.

'She gave him all her love.'

'And did he love her as well?'

'As much as it was in his nature to love anyone he loved her, I believe.'

'They had loved each other since they were children so?'

'Yes.'

Folly nodded her head, looking absently before her.

'Poor girl!' she murmured, still meditating.

'Shall I ask her to come with me to-morrow morning?'

'Do you think she would?'

'I feel sure she will.'

‘Oh no ; that isn’t possible. A man might forgive so much, but not a woman. I know by my own feelings. If a woman had robbed me of the one I loved, and injured him, I could in my heart never forget or forgive the cruelty. It would be false to pretend to.’

‘But if you were shown that the woman acted in ignorance, and that reason commanded you to be merciful to her——’

‘Why then I might refrain from revenging myself ; I would try to do her good ; if it were necessary, I would strip myself to clothe her. I would do more than reason demanded of me ; but I could not forget her cruelty, and in my heart I could not forgive her.’

Vane saw that it was useless to oppose her conviction, and was silent.

‘No, I will not see the girl I have wronged,’ Folly continued. ‘If she loved him deeply and is good, she herself would shrink from offering friendship which her heart could not support. And I—how could I receive kindness from her hand ? Her very name is a reproach to me, knowing the one she might have borne. She can never be

my friend, nor I anything but her bankrupt debtor. If ever we meet, it will be when she needs help from me, and so God grant we never may! There, it is finished. We will talk of it no more.'



CHAPTER XII.

FOLLY TAKES OFF HER WEDDING-RING.



FOLLY determined to go to the theatre as usual at night-time. 'I have gone through my business with troubles on my heart before, why should I not again?' she said.

Vane took her to the theatre, and after the performance returned with her to Clapham.

She shuddered when they came to the gate and looked up at the house. Not a light was visible, Miss Clip, with maidenly fear, having fortified herself by closing all the shutters. She clung tightly to Vane's arm as they walked by the path to the door, and begrudged each lingering footstep that brought her nearer to their separation.

'Good-night,' he said, when, in answer to

his knock, Miss Clip began to unbolt and unchain the door.

She gave him her hand, and said in a trembling voice :

‘We can only say that four times again.’

These words she had repeated again and again to herself as they came from the theatre, and the thought had kept her silent.

‘Good-night,’ he repeated, pressing her hand.

Her response came in a sigh like a faint echo ; their hands parted, and Vane left the door quickly to end an adieu which was only less painful to him than to her. Something more than commiseration touched him. It was a sense of his own suffering which made this foretaste of final separation bitter.

Turning at the gate he saw that Folly still stood by the open door ; he waved his hand and walked on quickly.

‘It seems cruel,’ he thought, ‘to leave the poor friendless little thing alone there with the dead. But there is no help for it.’ He sighed, and pulled out the comforting pipe from his pocket. At that moment his ear caught the ‘click’ of a gate behind him.

‘Surely she has not come down to the gate!’ he said, turning round. It seemed

that she had, however, for between him and the distant lamp he saw the figure of a woman running towards him. In another moment there was no doubt in his mind—it was Folly. He hastened to meet her.

‘What has happened?’ he asked, in alarm.

‘Nothing—nothing,’ she answered, stammering; ‘only you—you—didn’t tell me what time I might expect you to-morrow.’

‘Oh, Folly, you should not run out in that manner—unless,’ he added, seeing her countenance fall under his reproach, ‘unless it is for something serious.’

‘I thought it was serious,’ she said, walking along by his side towards the gate with her head bent, and not daring to take his arm.

He took her hand, leading her like a child in silence, for he had as little courage to speak as she.

‘I won’t make you angry with me again,’ she said, submissively. ‘There’s only a little time now to bear with me.’

‘Poor child, I wish there were longer!’ said Vane, speaking from his heart.

She raised her head quickly, and looked into his face, struck by his words and the tone of regret in which he spoke. There

was sorrow in his eyes as well as his voice.

‘Does he like me, then, so well that parting pains him?’ she asked herself. And that question was followed by another. ‘Why should he leave me if it grieves him? Why should he not stay to be loved and worshipped by me until he grows weary and tires of me?’

Just then they came to the gate, whither Miss Clip, overcoming her fears of lurking robbers, had ventured, so there Vane and Folly parted again.

It was characteristic of their respective sexes, that while Vane was blind to the constantly recurring evidence of Folly’s love, she detected the first demonstration of a reciprocal feeling in him which he himself misunderstood.

Vane could not think of Folly but as a child—which was not remarkable, perhaps, considering how like a child she was in many things. Her simplicity, her passionate anger and speedy contrition, her submissiveness to one whose authority she could recognise—these were all phases of an undeveloped, uncultured nature. He saw nothing extraordinary in her affection. It had been his

fortune to earn the love of old and young ; he was no stranger to the passionate outbursts of grateful hearts. It did not surprise him that a sensitive forsaken child should respond to kindness—kindness she had too seldom met with—when the very dogs in the street would lick his kindly hand ; and he took that for gratitude which had a root far deeper than gratitude throws out, with fibres that penetrated her heart and wove themselves inextricably in its fabric.

It was but natural he should feel deeply interested in the girl. A weed from the ditch, a pebble from the sea, a fledgling from the forsaken nest, anything we have rescued from obscurity, or which owes its beauty to our fostering care, enters into our life and becomes, as it were, part of ourselves ; and for this reason alone Folly must have become endeared to Vane. More than this, it was impossible that one of his disposition should not respond to such intense affection as she displayed for him. Insensibly his response was exceeding the temperate limits of impassionate affection. Had he suspected the fact, and put to himself the question, ‘ Could you love a boy as you love this girl ? ’ he must have answered ‘ No,’ and seen the danger.

Now that her father was dead, and there was one less to think of and to love, Folly's whole thought and affection centred upon Richard Vane; and as the time drew nearer and nearer for their parting, thoughts of her future desolation came unbidden to her mind, and, like clouds precursing the storm, robbed her of rays while still the sun shone. It seemed to her as if she must make some great effort to revoke her doom. At night when she sat alone she racked her invention for means to overcome the necessity for separation, discarding one hopeless scheme after another, until in despair she gave license to imagination and indulged in wild impossible dreams. At one time she fancied the whole world dead but herself and Vane; at another she conceived herself accused of some devilish crime, in which she accused Vane of participation that they might both be killed together; all the visions were gloomy—she never thought of a happier future than that of dying with the man she loved. She did not dream of living long years of happiness with him; that was an impossibility which she never lost sight of in her most extravagant moments.

She watched for his coming, and followed

him about whenever it was possible, like a pet creature—at first shyly, fearing to displease him or excite his ridicule by her persistency; and then she invented a thousand ingenious pretexts for being at the window when he came, for returning to the room in which he sat, for delaying his departure. But afterwards, when she saw that he himself was glad to be with her and sorry to leave her, she ceased to offer excuses.

‘I shall not go to the theatre to-morrow night,’ she said to Vane as they were coming from the theatre on Friday. ‘I have told them they must do without me. You will stay with me until the night-time?’

Vane gave his consent, and they walked in silence until they reached the gate before the house.

‘Don’t leave me just yet. It must be quite early: we seem to have walked here in half the usual time. Just take me as far as the corner of the road.’

Vane obeyed. Folly clung tightly to his arm and said never a word. He told her something about the stars shining over their heads, and she looked up and listened. She did not understand much of what he told her, but it was lovely to look at the heavens

and listen to his mellow voice, and be quite close to him; and she felt that she should never look at the stars again without tears. And so they walked half a mile beyond the corner of the road, and, returning to the gate, stood there some minutes before he found courage to leave her.

‘Good-bye,’ he said at length, holding out his hand.

She took it without answering, and held it for a moment with her head bent, then she raised her eyes to his face. They were standing near a lamp, and the light fell upon her. Vane saw that her cheeks were pale, and the long lashes of her eyes wet, and while he was still wondering what thought was behind her wistful look she lifted her pretty lips up to be kissed. A tremor seized Vane’s limbs, his brain throbbed with delirious thought, and he burned with a desire to clasp the yielding beauty to his heart, and drink the sweetness from her offered lips. Only for an instant he stood in hesitation, then, as his soul beat down the lower passion of his nature, he bowed and touched the young girl’s forehead lightly with his lips.

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The earth closed over John Morrison.

‘One,’ said Folly, turning from the grave, and then she looked at Vane, whom she was next to lose. A few hours more, and all that she loved on earth would be gone from her.

Instinctively she knew that their parting was to be final. Vane’s heart ached as the hours passed, for Folly not less than himself. He dreaded the last moment, and wished it over. He knew now that she was a woman, and that his love for her was not as for a child. The separation which he had previously looked upon as partial he saw must, for her sake as for his, be complete. Virtually he could see her no more.

When the tea-things were removed Folly complained that the light of the gas hurt her eyes. Vane rose and turned the burners down; then he returned to his chair.

‘Won’t you smoke?’ asked Folly.

‘Not yet; I shall want my pipe when I leave you.’

‘Let me light it now: it is for the last time.’

He filled his pipe, and she held the light to it with trembling fingers. She sat and watched him silently until he laid the pipe down, playing with the rings upon her finger the while. Then she drew her chair quite

close to his, and in a voice hardly raised above a whisper, she said :

‘I want to ask you something.’

‘I will answer, Folly.’

‘Will you answer me quite truly—I mean without concealment?’

‘Yes.’

She waited awhile, and then asked :

‘Do you love me?’

‘Indeed I do.’

‘But not much?’

‘I love you sincerely.’

‘But tell me—why did you kiss my forehead last night when I held up my lips?’

Vane took time to frame his answer, and then said :

‘Because you are a woman, and that was the only kind of kiss I might give you.’

‘Then you do not feel for me the kind of love that I feel for you.’

Vane did not reply.

‘You know that I love you,’ she said, slipping from her seat to the floor upon her knees at his feet ; ‘you know that I worship you with my whole soul ; that I would lay down my life, all and everything that I have, for one sweet look from your eyes. Is it a love like that you feel for me?’

Vane dared not answer.

‘Why should you not love me so? Look, I am pretty, prettier still when I am gay and happy. You may make me happy. I know I am ignorant, but I will learn. I am quick and ready. I will not sleep, will not ask to see you till I have learned the tasks you set me. I have been wicked and silly, but I am repentant, and shall grow wise and merciful and beautifully good with you to reverence and copy.’

Vane looked at the kneeling girl, and quivered with emotion.

‘Do not answer but with your eyes. Look into mine and read the love and fidelity of my soul. If you will speak, wait until you know your own heart. You may think you only pity me, but that is not all. I have watched you. I have seen the love kindle your eyes when I came unexpectedly by your side; I have seen them sadden when you parted from me—that was not pity. I have seen your fingers tremble, as mine do, when our hands joined. I have seen my love reflected in your face in a dozen signs which I myself have shown, and pity was not my emotion. You do love me, dear master. One word, do you wish to leave me?’

‘That also you know.’

‘Yes, yes, I know that you would make me your companion, your friend, your wife. Then why shall we part?’

‘Do you forget that you are married, Folly?’

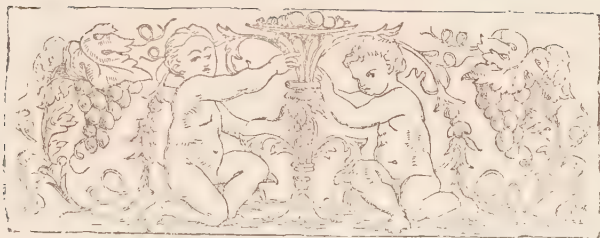
‘Married!’ she cried; ‘if that is marriage which has no sign but this,’ she touched her wedding ring, ‘then any union without that sign is holier and better.’ She took the ring from her finger and then said, ‘Now will you take me?’

Vane rose, and lifting Folly, said:

‘These are a brother’s arms in which you rest and not a husband’s. I love you, Folly, indeed, but with a love deeper than that you have read in my unconscious face. Put on that ring again, dear love, you must wear it to the end. There is a love which you yourself have overlooked, though it lives in your soul—the love which lives in purity and makes us accept suffering to shield those dearer than ourselves from pain. Farewell, dear Folly,—we must love, as we must live, apart.’

Folly buried her face in her hands, and burst into an agony of tears. For a moment

Vane standing over her hesitated, sentiment conflicting with reason in his heart ; then he placed her upon a chair, and, lifting her wet face in his hands, he kissed her once again, and then left her.



CHAPTER XIII.

FOLLY'S FAREWELL.

IT is necessary to be brief in detailing the events of the next eleven months. They passed wearily, like the hours of a winter's night to those in pain.

Folly remained but a few days longer in the villa at Clapham. She yielded for a while to her feelings, making no effort to remove the weight that oppressed her soul. Losing hope, she lost the incentive to action ; fearing no worse calamity than that which had befallen her, she was indifferent to the future. But love which had reduced her to this depth raised her from it, and with the desire to do that which Vane would have

had her do, she shook off her apathy and prepared to be 'good.'

Miss Clip had to make up for the respite given her by plenteous exertion. In the first place she was to take a message to the irate manager of the *Levity*, saying that the indisposition which had prevented Folly appearing on the stage for the past two nights was ended, and that she would certainly resume her part the ensuing evening; then to seek suitable apartments; and after that to find some one who would purchase the villa. She returned, having taken rooms in Craven Street, Strand, and instructed an estate agent to call upon her mistress. When he came, Folly put into his hands the box which Roland had shown her contained the title-deeds of the house, and told him to give her as much for them and the furniture, the carriage and the ponies, as they were worth. In a couple of days the agent found a customer, and handed over a cheque for the amount realised; and then Folly gave up possession and removed to her apartments in Craven Street with as much indifference as if it were but to another room in the same house. At Miss Clip's entreaty she deposited the money in a bank. The following

morning the agent called upon her, bringing Sir Andrew Aveling's cheque, which the new tenant had found where Folly had left it, in the corner of the chimney-glass.

'I don't know what to do with it,' she said, regarding the cheque carelessly, 'but I suppose it may come in useful one of these days;' so she slipped it in with the miscellaneous collection of odds and ends at the bottom of her workbox.

She went back to her business at the theatre with the desire rather to please her audience than herself; it was Richard Vane's hopes she thought of as she came from the wings, and no longer her own ambition. She tried to play better than ever she had played before, but the old spirit had left her never to return, and her performance lacked that spontaneous gaiety which had made her successful and won all hearts to her. This falling off was evident to the manager, but he hoped that the brightness would return to her, not doubting that the cloud which now hung over her would quickly pass away. It became evident to Folly and she despaired, feeling that the gloom was not the effect of a transient grief, but a lasting sorrow.

Her sun had set.

In February John Barrington said : ' We must put up something else, " Andromeda " don't draw now. The burlesque has had a wonderful run, but it must be changed for something else at Easter.'

' I'm glad,' said Folly, with a sigh.

' Well, you seem to be getting tired of it. What would you like, Folly ? something of the same sort again ?'

' I don't care what you have,' answered she ; ' I shan't play in it.'

' What do you mean ?' the manager asked, aghast at the cool announcement. ' Not play in it—you must.'

Overcoming her natural disposition to answer John Barrington in his own imperative tone, Folly said :

' I don't want to be angry with you. You say I must, I say I shan't, that's all. I want to be good, and so you must get somebody else to take my place, if you please. " Andromeda " 's well enough, the burlesque is just as good as ever it was, but I'm not.'

' Don't talk nonsense, my good girl,' said Barrington, more alarmed by Folly's dejection than annoyed by her impudence ; ' you'll be all right presently. Just the same as ever. You're not the first girl who's suffered ; but

you'll recover. You've had a row with young Aveling, eh?

'No, I haven't; you're not more clever than other inquisitive people, nor likely to know more either.'

Barrington did not reply. A manager of any standing must have his temper always under control, and have united the qualities of the dove and serpent in an eminent degree.

About a fortnight after, taking Folly at a favourable moment, when she came off the stage carrying a bouquet which he had caused to be thrown to her, he said :

'Ah, ah, my girl, your popularity is going up again, eh? Well, I've got a splendid idea for the new piece—a translation of Hervé's "*Jolie Diablesse*"—a first-rate part for you.'

'I told you I should not play in it.'

'But you spoke in haste. That goes for nothing, you know.'

'Well, I am not in haste now, and I tell you I shall not be here on Easter Monday.'

And on Easter Monday she was not there.

On the last day of her performance she saw a bill-sticker posting a great broadside

over her name on one of the hoardings. Six months ago it would have made her mad with envy to see another taking her place in popularity, but now she was unmoved. Nevertheless it was not without a pang of regret that she passed from the theatre for the last time. She recollected the wild delight of her first successful night ; the feeling of triumphant exultation with which she received from the audience a recognition of her power, the careless gaiety of those days before her father found her, when her young limbs moved in accordance with the joyousness of her heart, and all life seemed to her as bright as the tinselled scene she danced in.

She felt as if old age had come upon her already.

‘I can never be young again,’ she thought. And she watched the chorus girls leaving their dressing-room with laughter and snatches of song, wondering at their careless gaiety, who were none so young as she in years.

Her solitude was complete. She found it impossible to make a friend of any one of the people she knew, for, despite her wish to be ‘good,’ she could not help comparing them

with Vane, and their shortcomings irritated her and made her so unamiable, that the attempt to form a friendship was relinquished on both sides with mutual satisfaction. This solitude, and the loss of those occupations for her mind which had previously existed, increased her yearning desire to see Vane and be near him, and it was only by the strongest efforts of self-control she refrained from seeking him in his home. For this reason she was glad when the proposed alteration of the Levity programme was made. It suggested to her a means of escaping the torture of living near the one she loved yet dared not approach. She resolved to go abroad. Solitude would be less unbearable there.

On Easter Monday she packed up the things she wished to take. They went all in one box—the scarlet handkerchief Esperenza had given her during her first rehearsal; the bouquet he had thrown to her on her first appearance—it was represented now by a bunch of twigs and yellow leaves and rusted wire; the flaming poster which her friend the stage-doorkeeper of the Garden had brought her; the watch with her name jewelled upon the back; her father's necktie

—these were all she cared for ; the rest she left to Miss Clip's care.

It was not a large case in which she packed her treasures, yet there was room for more—something else was needed there.

‘I have nothing to remind me of him,’ she said, her heart aching as she bent over the souvenirs of her friends. Poor child, she wanted something to weep over !

On Tuesday she went to the bank, and, with the assistance of the clerk there, drew a cheque for all the money she had deposited. Thence she took a cab home, straining her eyes to scan the faces of the crowds she passed. It seemed to her as if she must see his face among them on this her last day in England.

‘I want no more than just to see him,’ she said to herself. But there was no face like Vane's in Fleet Street or the Strand that day, and she turned into the deserted street she lived in with the wish ungratified, and almost insupportable. She sat in the cab unable to give up the hope until the cabman came and opened the door for her to step out.

‘Do you know such a place as Spitalfields ?’ she asked, her face flushing with excitement.

‘I should back I do, miss, seein’ I was borned in Artillery Lane, and——’

‘Drive me there—Church Street,’ said Folly, cutting short the biography.

‘What number, miss?’

‘Fifty.’

‘Why, that’s Miss Vane’s! Is she your friend, miss?’

Folly shook her head.

‘Beg pardin’ for asking, miss, but I’d be proud to drive any friend of that lady’s or her brother’s either.’

The cabman was going away; Folly called him back.

‘What do you know about Mr. Vane?’ she asked.

‘Well, I don’t know much about *’im*, though I hear he’s wonderful good too. It’s *er* as I know best, bein’ a widower, miss, and findin’ her as good as a mother to my youngsters. Lord, miss, it’s a hard thing for a poor cabby, as is out here his thirt’n hour a day, leaving his poor little helpless things at home to do for *’emselves*, and wonderin’ all the time whether Tommy’s gone out and lost hisself in “the lane,” or Charley’s set the blessed place afire with his fondness for lucifer matches; but a man can drive about

with a easy mind if he knows his kids are bein' fed and washed and took care on by such a lady as that Miss Vane——'

'But Mr. Vane?'

'Well, he goes out a teachin' or suthin'. I've only seen him oncet, when I went in the evening to fetch away my young uns from the nussery, as Miss Vane calls her house. Bless you, you'll see a sight if you're goin' there—fifty or sixty children all bein' cared for and looked after like as if——'

'Drive me there,' said Folly.

Folly trembled with emotion when the cab drew up in front of the house in Church Street, Spitalfields. She feared that Vane would be pained by the interview. She repented coming, and half hoped that he would not be at home.

She looked up at the windows of the plain, old-fashioned house, but saw no one except some children. Then she screwed up her courage, stepped out of the cab, and knocked timidly at the door.

'Is Mr Vane at home?' she asked in faltering accents of the buxom servant who opened the door.

'No, miss, but Miss Vane is upstairs. Would you like to see her?'

Folly, without a motive, nodded, and followed the domestic into a sitting-room, where she was left alone. A grey coat, that Folly knew well, lay upon a chair. She crossed the room quickly and took it up. A handkerchief peeped from one of the pockets. She listened. Not a sound but the voices of the children above reached her ear. In a moment she whipped out the handkerchief and slipped it into her pocket. The theft was scarcely completed when the handle of the door turned, and she dropped the coat upon the chair as Miss Vane entered the room.

She knew it was Madge, though she bore no likeness to Richard, except in the sweet softness of her eyes. That was enough; no one but his sister could have such eyes. Folly saw nothing but them; it was afterwards that she noticed those particulars of dress and appearance which usually a woman takes in with the first glance.

For a moment Madge was perplexed by the silence of her visitor, who hardly returned her initiative bow, and struck by her beauty; then it dawned upon her that this lovely girl, with her pale small face and dress of black, must be Folly.

‘ You have come to see our children ? ’ she said, feeling only less constrained than Folly.

‘ No,’ Folly replied, ‘ I did not come to see them. I came to say good-bye to your brother.’

Madge had no longer any doubt as to who she was that spoke ; she did not pretend surprise or ignorance, but merely bowed. She might have looked with compassionate pity upon any other girl in Folly’s position, but from her she shrank with an uncontrollable feeling of aversion. Womanly delicacy, womanly prejudice, limited her charity and prevented her from sharing her brother’s boundless humanity. Duty, not inclination, prompted her to forgive the girl who had done her and the man she loved irreparable injury. She noticed that Folly, trembling, leant heavily upon the chair she stood by for support. She placed a chair and asked her to be seated ; then she withdrew to the other side of the table and stood there waiting calmly for what should follow, pride giving her strength to stand without support.

‘ Tell him,’ said Folly, bending her eyes upon the ground and speaking slowly, ‘ tell

him I'm trying to be good—trying all I can.' She either feared to tell her name or took it for granted she was known. 'Tell him that I can't amuse the people as I did, though I do my best and try as I never tried before; and say I am going away—right away—ever so far. Tell him I think I shall find an old friend where I am going, and so he needn't mind about me—and I don't think there's anything else.'

She lifted her wet eyes, and happily could not see through the tears that stood in them, that the softness had gone from his sister's eyes. 'And then just say to him "Good-bye"—that's all,' she added.

'My brother will return in two hours, if you would prefer telling him what you have to say yourself,' said Margaret.

'No. It will be better for him not to see me. I only want him to know that I do not forget.'

'He will be glad to hear that,' said Margaret, in her impassive voice; and then, as Folly rose, she asked: 'Would you like to see the children now you are here?'

Folly nodded, thinking that possibly she might learn a better way of doing good than by dancing and singing at a theatre—might

possibly imitate his sister in benevolence. She followed Margaret through the rooms in which the children were disposed, and saw the ladies who assisted her engaged in teaching and amusing them. She listened to the plan on which the nursery was conducted, and saw the means by which the scheme was carried out. She said nothing, but turned away with a sigh. The perfect order that existed everywhere, the neatness of the ladies engaged in the work, and their perfect propriety, dashed her hopes.

‘It must take a deal of patience and a deal of washing to make little common children so quiet and clean as that,’ said she, descending the stairs.

‘It is not so difficult as it seems, perhaps,’ said Margaret.

‘Perhaps not. I could never sit straight in a chair with my back up like those ladies. But it is a good thing nevertheless.’

‘We might do more if our resources were greater—if we had more money.’

Folly stopped, bethinking herself of the money she had drawn from the bank, and, after rummaging in her pockets, found the cheque.

‘I have no patience, and I can’t teach, but I have money,’ said she; ‘and if you will take this piece of paper and use it for the poor little things, you can’t tell how glad I shall be.’

Margaret took the crumpled cheque with formal tones. Her coldness, which was by no means habitual, seemed to Folly part of that goodness which was to her inimitable. It made her think of the Sunday-school she had seen once, and of all the offences against propriety of which she was guilty. She stopped Margaret as she was about to open the street-door.

‘I want to tell you something,’ she said. ‘While I was waiting for you in that room—I took a handkerchief from his pocket—your brother’s coat. May I keep it?’

‘Certainly,’ answered Margaret, who could not at all understand the girl.

‘God bless you!’ said Folly, her lips quivering. ‘I wanted something of his to take with me as a token.’

Her thoughts were with Vane, and she passed from the house and left it without responding to the slight inclination of the head with which Margaret bade her farewell. She could not think of him and her together.

Sitting back in the corner of the cab, she held his handkerchief to her eyes.

‘If I could but have seen his face,’ she thought. Then it struck her that he was to return to the house in two hours. It was already growing dusk. She opened the trap in the roof of the cab, and as the cabman, drawing up his horse, bent down his head for instructions, she said :

‘I will get down here.’

‘It was in Bishopsgate Street that she got out. She went into a draper’s shop and bought a thick veil, and, wearing it, she walked through Brushfield Street into Church Street with nervous, hasty footsteps. Standing at the corner of Brick Lane, she commanded a view of Vane’s house only a few doors removed, and of all the approaches to it. There she waited and watched, regardless of the rough comments of the men and women who passed, until when it had become dark, save for the light of the street lamps, she saw a well-known figure coming from the farther end of Church Street. He drew nearer and nearer, stopped, knocked at the door, and turning, stood so that the light of the lamp fell full upon him. Then the poor girl, clinging to the rail but a few paces

from him, saw once again the face she had longed to behold. Impatient of the veil, and careless of any consequences, she tore it down, and for a minute feasted her hungry eyes. The door opened, he entered with a smile upon his face for the one who admitted him, passed into the house, and so was lost to Folly. The door closed, and the sound reaching her ears, the girl, still clinging to the rails, bowed her head and felt as if the life were leaving her.

‘What’s the matter?—don’t you feel well, miss?’ a woman who had been watching her said, coming to her side. She shook her head in silence, and with a little wave of the hand walked away.

The next morning Folly left England for ever.



CHAPTER XIV.

MADGE.

‘**Y**OU look grave, Madge,’ said Vane, as he sat at tea. ‘What has happened?’

‘I have had a visitor,’ answered Margaret, avoiding her brother’s eye. ‘Folly has been here.’

He did not seem surprised; he bent his head and waited to hear more.

‘She wished to see you; she is going to leave England.’

‘Her name is withdrawn from the papers. Well?’

Margaret gave Folly’s message in cold, unsympathetic tones. Vane listened, resting his face on his hands, his elbow on the table, and neither moved nor spoke for some time

after Margaret had ceased to speak. The message was full of pathos to him, and rendered more touching by the tone in which it was delivered, for it showed him how little pity the struggling, failing, desolate heart-broken girl had to expect.

Margaret had been trying since Folly's departure to think kindly of her, and, having failed, was naturally cross with herself; and, as everyone knows, when one is displeased with one's self it is an impossibility to be amiable to anyone else.

'She took your handkerchief from your old grey jacket when no one was in the room, though she afterwards admitted doing so, and asked permission to keep it "for a token," as she put it; and as she was leaving she put into my hand a cheque for charitable purposes, value two thousand eight hundred pounds. She seems to me a most incomprehensible young person.'

'Why?' asked Vane, quietly.

'To take a handkerchief when no one was looking, like a—well, like a quite common person, and then give a cheque for that enormous sum, and to pretend such distress, and wear a silk that I'm sure must have cost eight or ten shillings a yard.'

‘Madge dear, you do not think of what you are saying. If I were cruel enough to write down your words you would beg me in an hour’s time to be merciful and burn them. You do not believe that she was dishonest in her grief or in the motive with which she took the handkerchief; there is nothing incomprehensible in a young person who can afford to give you two or three thousand pounds for charity wearing a rich dress; so your words have no value, and we will forget them at once.’

‘I don’t see why we should be expected to pity everyone who does wrong, and I think you strain a good principle too far. If people do wrong or make mistakes they must suffer.’

‘They must, and we who are happier must lessen their troubles if we can. Come, Madge, you cannot cheat me into the belief that your heart has grown suddenly hard. Come here to me, little sister, and tell me what has irritated you, and made you, who have suffered so much, impatient of others’ misfortunes.’

Madge dropped her head and came slowly to his side. He put his arm around her and drew her on to his knee. Suddenly her for-

titude gave way ; she threw her arms about his neck and, burying her face in his shoulder, burst into tears. Presently through her sobs she said :

‘ I—I—I have been trying to love her like my sister, and to be as good and kind in my thoughts of her as I should be ever since she went : and I can’t.’

She still loved Roland.

* * * * *

The nursery instituted by Vane and his sister was the first of many of the kind which have sprung up. The object was to provide for the children of poor working people whose vocations took them from home during the day. The parents paid according to their means, and the children were treated alike. The space, once a garden, at the back of the house was used as a playground, and the spacious rooms not required by Vane and his sister for their personal requirements were devoted to the purposes of the nursery. Margaret received many offers of support from religionists of various denominations who wished to use the charity as the means of spreading the peculiar views of their sects ; but, by Vane’s advice, she declined them all.

and sent the propagandists about their own business, which was far enough removed from hers.

‘If we are to teach them,’ said Vane, ‘let us begin with the subjects they can understand. The first thing is to keep their little bodies out of harm’s way ; their souls will not suffer.’

He had too much reverence for religion to give children a distaste for it by forcing them to swallow a mental food which they were not yet in a condition to like, much less to digest properly. He would not countenance the decoration of the rooms with scriptural texts, but gave the preference to coloured lithographs and amusing sketches cut from the pages of *Punch*.

The generality of charitable people looked with suspicion upon an institution so exclusively secular ; nevertheless some ladies more rational than the rest came forward and gave their services, which were gratefully accepted by Madge. She wanted the approval of delicate natures like her own, not having that robust and fearless independence of character which distinguished her brother. Possibly she would have liked better teaching in a Sunday-school, despite her conviction that

the work she was engaged in had a wider range, and went further to the production of honest men and women than the more conventional schemes. It was hard and unpleasant labour to keep the little waifs and strays clean, to patch and darn their rags of clothes, to like boys who lied and swore and girls who stole and deceived. The depravity of these mere infants stupefied her at first. She, who had seen nothing like it, had not conceived its existence; and it was some time before she could summon energy to attack the enormous difficulties with which she was brought in daily practice face to face. In accepting work so readily, she had not anticipated its disagreeable consequences. Her brother's never-failing help, his counsel, and his approval stimulated her, and the readiness with which the class for whom the nursery was provided availed themselves of its advantages encouraged her; nevertheless Margaret Vane achieved only by conscious effort that which was simple and easy to Richard and to some of the stronger women who worked with her. The sense of duty was never absent from her mind, and she toiled like one who ascends a steep hill for business and not for pleasure. She en-

deavoured to forget herself and think only of promoting the happiness of others, but the endeavour only increased her consciousness of its own necessity.

Richard did all in his power to reconcile her to London by taking her to concerts and the theatre frequently, and providing her with a plentiful supply of light reading from Mudie's, but these temporary distractions hardly improved matters. The children seemed naughtier the morning after she had feasted on music, and London dirtier and duller after seeing the brightness of the stage, and her own condition less enviable by comparison with the heroines of fiction. The cleanliness and purity of country life was in complete harmony with her delicate and dainty nature ; a harebell amidst the refuse of the adjoining green market would not have been more out of place than she was in Spitalfields. Her cuffs and collars, which had kept clean in Tangley for three whole days, were not fit to be worn after a few hours' exposure to the smoky atmosphere of London ; curtains had to be washed once a week, and came home from the laundry looking infinitely worse than six months' wear in the old parsonage would have rendered them. In a

word, practical far-going philanthropy was not her *métier*.

Richard Vane watched his sister with loving, anxious eyes, and it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that not a sign of her dissatisfaction escaped him, despite the caution with which she guarded her feelings in his presence. He saw that she was unfitted for the exertions she had undertaken. While they took her thoughts from Roland, and prevented her from brooding over her loss and disappointment, he was content that her mind should be occupied by them; but when as months passed away, and there was a reasonable hope that her sufferings on this account had lost their first poignancy, he became anxious that she should change her occupation in London for one more suitable in a place less discordant with her tastes. But he foresaw the difficulty of making her resign an undertaking which by its difficulties bound her to perseverance, and of leaving him to pursue his work alone. An unexpected solution of this difficulty was offered, in the month of August, by Amadis Garnier.



CHAPTER XV.

A DIFFICULT QUESTION AND ITS ANSWER.

THE intimacy between Garnier and the Vances had steadily increased from its commencement. He was their guest at Christmas, and if his attentions to Margaret at that time were unwelcome, it was by no fault of his, but because of the invidious contrast they presented with the neglect of her absent lover. His visits became frequent when the brother and sister settled in London, and at length they who had always welcomed him as a guest came to desire his society as a friend. He seemed unalterable: he was always polite, considerate, and agreeable.

‘If Amadis ever loses his temper it must be in that brief interval between washing and

putting the final touches on his face and moustache,' said Vane to his sister. 'He is an artist, and knows how impossible it would be to make anyone believe him seriously moved with wrath while his complexion retained its habitual rosiness and his hair refused to bristle.' The vanity he displayed in attending to his personal appearance ceased in time to be ridiculous to them. It was a weakness, but then it was the weakness of a man they liked, and so came to be as unnoticeable as a slight physical deformity in one's brother.

Madge liked him, and accepted his quiet, unobtrusive sympathy. His slippers were ever ready by her brother's, and the spare room, which after a time was called Mr. Garnier's, she kept as neat and pretty as her own, and its hangings as white as the abominable air of Spitalfields would permit. He showed great interest in the nursery, and painted one room with frescoes of a fanciful and grotesque kind, which were highly entertaining to the children. He even tried once to amuse a squad of boys by telling them a story of adventure, but he candidly admitted his inability to do anything more practically charitable than giving money when he was

asked for it,—‘And not always with enjoyment that,’ he added, with that slight movement of his lips which indicated a disposition to smile.

This inability to render practical assistance to the necessities of those with whose sufferings we compassionate, was the subject of conversation between Richard Vane and Garnier one night as they strolled along the Victoria Embankment. The day had been hot, and they had walked thither for a little fresh air, leaving Madge, who complained of fatigue, at home.

‘If I saw a man or a woman starving for a loaf of bread, I could no more go and fetch that loaf from a baker’s than I could fly in the air. I’d give five shillings and welcome if they would only ask for it; but the ready way of alleviating the want would never occur to me—probably I shouldn’t act upon it if it did. I have a rooted objection to being laughed at, and I feel sure that a man like me walking through the open thoroughfare with a loaf would be laughed at; yet I think I can say, without injustice, that I should feel as deeply as those who had the moral courage to fetch the bread.’

‘But if it were pointed out to you that

you ought to fetch the loaf, you would fetch it, Garnier ?'

'Yes, but I should like the errand none the better. I should feel very much like a poor devil of a recruit who is compelled to face the guns he would fly from if he could.'

'We are not all intended for the same purpose, or there would be no weak ones for the strong to help ; it is the province of one to be useful and of another to be ornamental,' Vane said with a laugh ; then added in mock gravity, 'Not that I wish to accuse you of being either the one or the other.'

'If we were all blind one could desire nothing better than to be as exclusively useful as you, Mr. Vane,' answered Garnier, responding to Vane's pleasantry, 'but in the interests of those with eyes to see, I would point out the advantage of some men having a combination of the two qualities. Speaking seriously, for the matter has given me many an hour's anxiety, I am inclined to think that a man, after giving his abilities a fair trial, should desist from wasting his time in unfruitful efforts and direct his energies to the objects for which they are given him.'

'Chaucer, if I remember him rightly, says something like that :

“Wise men alwaie affirme and saie,
That best 'tis for a manne
Diligentlie for to applie
The bestè way he canne.”

‘That is certainly what I have come to think. And so with charity it is, I think, for the favoured few to be actively benevolent and for the majority to be passive.’

‘It’s rather a Jesuitical way of shuffling off one’s responsibilities though,’ said Vane, without detecting the curious glance hastily cast at him by Garnier at this imputation of Jesuitism.

‘Nevertheless I am convinced that it is a good and sufficient reason for ceasing to mortify one’s self with unsuccessful attempts, and this conviction has grown upon me by recent observations.’

‘Recent observations—of whom?’

‘Of your sister.’

Vane was silent. Garnier continued :

‘In her one sees the tenderest feelings of humanity joined with the most ardent desire to render practical assistance, and yet it is clear that she is physically unfit for her self-imposed task.’

‘It is true,’ Vane responded, gravely.

‘It is noticeable she grows thinner and

paler. It is more difficult to raise a smile in her face now than when the shock of Roland's infidelity first fell upon her. She constantly wears the look of fatigue which one may see upon the faces of children employed in factories, who, poor little things, are set to close work before the natural time of their careless freedom has expired.'

'Madge is not strong, and London does not agree with her.'

'That is a sufficient reason for everything one sees and regrets ; yet it seems to me that the careworn expression of her features, which is so touching to witness, arises in a great measure from despondency. In her heart I believe she knows that she never can like the task she has undertaken.'

'This is all too true, I fear, Garnier. The very same reflections have occurred to me again and again of late, without my being able, alas ! to see a remedy for the evil. To leave me, and take a situation as governess or travelling companion, she must first be convinced that she is unable to carry out her present undertaking, and I think her love for me and her pride would be proof against all the arguments one could bring one's self to urge.' He was silent a moment, and then,

as if to close the subject, he said : 'The point is yours, Garnier ; but I wish the proof you brought to give conviction to your argument were not my sister.'

Garnier willingly dropped the abstract question ; it was the least interesting part of the discussion to him. After walking a few yards without speaking, he suddenly asked :

'Do you think your sister still thinks deeply about Roland Aveling ?'

'I cannot tell. Of course since his marriage she has schooled herself to think of him with altered sentiments. She never mentions his name. Possibly she is learning to forget him as well as to forgive him.'

'Do you think she has so far forgotten him that she would think without displeasure of marrying another man ?'

'That possibility has never entered my imagination. And yet,' added Vane, after a moment's pause, 'that would be the best thing that could happen.'

'I am glad you think so.'

'Yes, marriage would be the best thing for dear Madge. Not other women's children, but her own she ought to be caring for. She would be the best of wives ; but then our circle of acquaintances is smaller than ever,

and where are we to find a good husband for our little sister ?

Garnier did not reply to this question, but after walking a few yards farther he broke the silence by asking another :

‘Do you think your sister would marry me ?’



CHAPTER XVI.

A PORTRAIT OF AMADIS GARNIER, BY HIMSELF.



VANE was completely surprised by Garnier's question. He had looked upon him as a 'confirmed bachelor,' and he believed that this view was shared by Madge. Garnier he knew was of French extraction, if not actually a native of France, and the attentions he paid to Madge had not seemed excessive or at all more than might reasonably be expected from him. He was *aimable* to all, and the additional suavity of his manners to her were warranted by friendship and delicate sympathy. But there was no reason why he should not love her, and Vane wondered how he could have lost sight of such a probable result of his frequent visits and intimate communication with her.

He was not too old to be unsusceptible to her young beauty, nor so dull as to regard her attractions with indifference.

Vane walked silently by his companion's side. He was a slow thinker, and before he could consider whether Madge would accept Garnier he had to digest the fact that Garnier was prepared to make her an offer.

'Your silence makes me fear your answer,' said Garnier.

'Pardon me,' replied Vane. 'Your question was so unexpected that I find it difficult at once to comprehend the new relation in which it places us. I may be somewhat dull in these affairs, but I assure you I never thought of you as a possible lover of Madge.'

'I may have seemed to you too old?'

'I do not think it was for that reason.'

'I am aware that there is a considerable discrepancy in our age; it might be said that I am old enough to be her father. It would not be the romantic union for which a young and beautiful girl hopes; but whatever sacrifices your sister made she would have the satisfaction of knowing that they added appreciative gratitude to my love.'

'I do not think that Madge would again

place confidence in the affection of a young man.'

'Possibly my roving habits led you to imagine that I should never settle down?'

'Probably.'

'I have been a Rambler by necessity. The secluded life of a chambered bachelor would be intolerable to me. You, who know my restless disposition, who have seen me flying from place to place, never resting contentedly in one for three days together, may find it difficult to believe that I was once a passive domesticated man, spending my leisure hours in cultivating a garden and adorning my home, and passing the rest of the day in my counting-house.'

'Your counting-house!—you in business!' exclaimed Vane, in a tone of incredulity.

'It is a fact. I was a tanner in a quiet little village by the Seine. I was an only son, and succeeded to my father's business when he died. Before that event I was engaged to my cousin, but our marriage was postponed from time to time in consequence of her failing health. She was young; the doctors said she would recover, that there was nothing seriously wrong, that she had outgrown her strength. I was anxious, yet

I did not despair, and every effort I made to increase my business, to add to the charms of the old rustic house, with its great walled garden adjoining, were for her sake. I said to myself, "There is another thousand francs for Marie. When this graft bears a rose Marie will be my wife, and she shall pick it. This chamber shall be Marie's boudoir—shall I get the ceiling painted in time?"

He paused, and Vane took his arm in sympathy, and they walked side by side without speaking for some minutes; then Garnier, as if dismissing the gloomy thoughts from his mind by an effort, said:

'That is enough. She did not recover. You know now why I wandered. I sold my business, and, realising enough to ensure me an annual income more than sufficient for my wants, I left France, determined never to return to it again. That is thirty years since. For four years I travelled through Europe, but finding nowhere scenes or acquaintances so congenial to my tastes elsewhere, I settled in England—if that may be called settling which was without rest. Constant change and variety, and the action of thirty long years, have effaced from my mind the painful recollections of Lénore.'

‘Lénore?’

‘Marie was her second name—the one I loved to call her by,’ Garnier explained, without a moment’s hesitation. ‘It seems to me heartless to acknowledge it—but I have ceased to love Marie as I loved her once.’

‘It is no more than is natural,’ said Vane. ‘Providence is merciful, and dulls our memory to the past. I don’t see why you should think it heartless, knowing it to be from no want of love.’

‘Quite true, my dear Vane. I meant to say that it seems heartless that one should forget a lost bride while still cherishing the desire for a home in which she was to have been the presiding spirit. I am afraid I trouble you with these sentimental exceptions.’

‘If I do not quite understand them, I can at least sympathise with one whose feelings are so tenderly sensitive.’

‘I am grateful for your indulgence. As I said, the desire to have a home has never left me; it has, indeed, increased with my knowledge of English life and my inability to find contentment in varying scenes and changing acquaintances. I envied you your charming *ménage* at Tangley. “There,”

thought I, "a man could lead his life happily and well." I long to make for myself a similar home. Some antique cottage, overgrown with roses, embosomed in a fertile valley, rich in colour, fragrant with the odour of a thousand flowers, resounding with the song of birds and the hum of honey-laden bees; a home where I might still practise my poor skill as a painter, and, devoting myself to the interests of the simple people around me, might earn their respect and esteem.'

Vane's hand slipped away from Garnier's arm. He found it necessary to fill his pipe. He knew not why, but he had never liked Garnier less than now. He disliked the theatrical, French sentiment of the scene painted by the man who wished to marry his sister. Yet a Frenchman must be French, and the life he proposed was as good and honest as could be devised by the majority of men. Vane accused himself of prejudice and injustice, and set himself to look at the matter from Garnier's point of view.

'My dread of solitude, my inability to find a suitable companion, have precluded me from making the home I covet; but that objection would be removed if I were so happy as to obtain your sister's consent to be my wife.

My means are quite adequate—indeed, beyond the expenses of such a modest establishment. I could afford sufficient to gratify the benevolent inclinations of my wife.’

‘I do not know what Margaret’s feeling with regard to marriage may be,’ said Vane, when Garnier’s silence obliged him to speak. ‘I am convinced it would be well for her to marry.’

‘Have I your permission to address her on the subject?’

‘Certainly. Margaret will not give you her answer without careful consideration.’

‘That is in itself a compliment to me,’ answered Garnier; and then, seeing the constraint under which Vane spoke, he turned the subject.

The following afternoon he called upon Margaret, and after sitting with her for half an hour went away. The particulars of the interview Madge narrated to her brother when they were alone in the evening; and Vane found that Garnier had repeated in effect his statement of the night before, and added that he had serious thoughts of adopting the Protestant faith when he could benefit by Margaret’s instruction. He was glad to see that Madge did not regard her

lover's sentiment as meretricious, or look upon his proposed conversion with mistrust. 'I have been unjust and intolerant,' he said to himself. 'After all, there is nothing surprising in a man being sentimental in his love, or in his wishing to conform his religious views with those of the woman he admires.'

'And then he asked me if I would be his wife,' Madge said in conclusion.

'Yes, Madge. And what answer did you give him?'

'I said "No;" for indeed I felt at that moment as if I could never think of marrying anyone; but he pointed out to me that, though my sentiment might be averse to marriage now, it might alter with time, and begged me not to think of making a definite refusal until I became perfectly convinced that it was impossible for me to accept him as my husband.'

'Did you consent to that arrangement?'

'Yes.'

'Then you think it possible you may at some future time be his wife?'

'There is no one I would so willingly marry—now. He has good feeling, he is considerate, and I should make him happy.'

Poor Madge ! the romance had gone from her life.

‘ And when is Amadis to have your final answer ? ’ asked Vane.

‘ He will return in two months. He has affairs to settle in France that will take him away for that time.’

Garnier’s words returned to Vane’s memory : ‘ I left France, determined never to return again.’ That statement did not agree with his going to France now for two months to settle his affairs. It was possible that he had used the words merely as a figure of speech ; yet, after thirty years’ absence from his country, what affairs could he have there that required settling ? The question perplexed him, and his anxiety was increased by the necessity of concealing his thoughts from Margaret.



CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER PORTRAIT OF AMADIS GARNIER.

TOWARDS the end of the month Madge showed signs of ill health that alarmed Richard greatly. Leaving the 'nursery' in the hands of trustworthy friends, the brother and sister went to Dover, and gave themselves up to idle enjoyment of the sun and wind and waves. The effect upon Madge was remarkable. Her health improved every hour, and she seemed happier and gayer than Vane had seen her since her disappointment. She received a letter and a large bouquet sent by Garnier from Paris, and her satisfaction was apparent. Richard divined that she had already decided on the answer she should make when the two months expired

and Garnier returned to London, and he tried to dispel the doubt which still lingered in his mind respecting the man who was to be his brother-in-law. Another bouquet and letter came the first week in September, and then all communication was cut off; the Prussian armies blockaded Paris, and Garnier was among the besieged.

‘Is he in danger?’ Margaret asked, with anxiety, as Richard read the telegram from the newspaper.

‘No; unless curiosity takes him within range of the German guns. He is in less danger than a newspaper correspondent. For your sake, Madge, he will take care of himself.’

‘But cannot he be compelled to take up arms?’

‘I think not. I believe he might claim exemption as a naturalised Englishman. He is clever enough to avoid anything he dislikes, and I cannot think he would care to fight. Besides——’ Vane was about to say ‘he is too old,’ but, checking himself, said instead, ‘Besides, he does not seem influenced by any patriotic fervour. He talked in the calmest way about the Prussian victory at Wissembourg.’

‘He seemed greatly agitated that evening he was with us when the news came of the battle of Sedan and the surrender of the Emperor.’

Vane had himself remarked this fact. At first he attributed his agitation to national or political sympathy. As a Frenchman he might well be moved with disgust and shame that ‘the tragic man,’ who had plunged his country into war, loudly vaunting his determination to live or die by the result, should so readily yield his sword in order to survive his defeat. On the other hand, as an Imperialist, he might be shocked by the complete overthrow of the Empire which this *coup* indicated. But in reply to Vane’s question, Garnier had declared that he had no political opinions, and was neither a Republican nor an Imperialist, and looked upon Sedan merely as a national disaster. The indifference with which he had heard of the previous disaster, contrasting with his agitation on the subsequent occasion, now recurring to Vane’s mind, increased the feeling of uncertainty which distressed him.

No doubt of Garnier’s sincerity disturbed Madge in her contemplation of the future. He had excited her interest by dwelling on

those features of the life he desired to lead which were most consonant with her tastes ; he had won her sympathy by the confession of the past unhappiness which necessitated his restless wanderings, and now his position, which seemed to her not unfraught with danger, provoked her anxiety for him. When the siege should be raised, and he came to her, she felt it would be cruel to oppose his desire. And thus she not only reconciled herself to the idea of marriage, but actually looked forward to it with interest.

The two months passed ; Paris was still blockaded, and Garnier a prisoner within its walls. Could he have claimed Margaret's answer at this time it would undoubtedly have made her his wife.

Vane's field of action extended rapidly. As a philanthropist he strode out of the narrow circle of purely individual interests, and gave himself to the service of communities. He was, as all thinking philanthropists ever have been and ever must be, Republican in principle ; but earnest and sincere in everything that he undertook, he was a Republican not only in name. By word and deed he supported the cause of justice and reason. He recognised the right

divine of resistance, and in revolution he saw the only justification of bloodshed.

It is unnecessary for the purposes of this book to enter into the details of his work during these months. It brought him into contact with men of all nations who identified themselves with liberty and progress. Amongst them was a Frenchman, named Pierre Dumesnil, to whom Vane accidentally mentioned one day, in speaking of the siege, that he had a friend in Paris for whose safety he was concerned.

‘May I ask his name?’ said Dumesnil.

‘It is scarcely likely you will know him, for he abjures politics; his name is Amadis Garnier,’ answered Vane.

‘Amadis Garnier,’ repeated Dumesnil. ‘I should know that name. Pardon me—is he a friend, or merely an acquaintance of yours?’

‘A friend—an intimate friend. He has proposed marriage to my sister, and but for the blockade would probably be now my brother-in-law.’

‘Amadis Garnier,’ Dumesnil said again, slowly knitting his brows, as if trying to recall the man’s image by the association of the name. ‘I think he must have been in Paris

about the springtime—quite early—perhaps it was in January.’

‘I think you are mistaken. He was with me in Surrey at Christmas-time, and I have reason to suppose he has not been in France for thirty years.’

‘Then he cannot be the man I seem to remember. The Garnier I allude to was a *mouchard*, and Lambert’s right-hand man.’

‘The Garnier I know is an artist——’

‘Humph!’ grunted Dumesnil, interrupting Vane. ‘That adds to the singularity of the occurrence. A painter?’

‘Yes; an amateur rather than a professional artist, moving in good society.’

‘I wish you would come home with me to my rooms,’ said Dumesnil, quickly. ‘The suspicion I have of the man claiming your friendship must be cleared up.’

Vane readily accompanied Dumesnil. On their way to his lodgings the Frenchman gave Vane particulars of the infamous means by which Napoleon III. attempted to suppress the revolutionary feeling in Paris.

‘He could not be blind to the fact that a revolution was impending, and to intimidate the Parisians and make a show of the power which in reality he did not possess, he sup-

pressed a movement which was entirely of his own fabrication. This was the *modus operandi*:—The *mouchards* were sent in gangs to the cabarets resorted to by *ouvriers*. All were dressed to represent unemployed labourers, and one feigned drunkenness. This man emptied the sous from his pocket and offered *petits verres* all round ; if he had not enough money one of his accomplices would produce sufficient to pay for all who were fools enough to accept the generosity. Then the leader began to talk sedition, attributing the want of work and low wages to the Emperor, and soon, by his arguments and example, got two or three foolish fellows, who in their sober moments eschewed politics altogether, to join him in some noisy phrase. It was sufficient if they cried, “A bas Lambert !” or, “Ou est Badinguet ?” In a moment the *mouchards* showed their police authority, and, with much display, marched their unlucky dupes through the streets to the Prefecture. The fainter spirits were certainly intimidated by this show of vigilance, and so the scheme found favour among those who justify the means by the end.’

‘The idea was worthy of the Jesuits.’

‘Precisely. It arose from one of their

order, or I am mistaken. For the safety of my friend I obtained all the particulars I could relative to this affair, and made a list of the men who were known or suspected of being engaged in it. The scheme failed of its effect, and the *escroqueur's* only chance of safety from the justice of his countrymen was to give himself up to the tenderer mercies of the Prussians.'

When they arrived at Dumesnil's apartment, the Frenchman took a pocket-book from a drawer in a bureau and turned over the pages, reading carefully.

'Did you ever hear Garnier addressed by any other name?' he asked.

'No.'

'Not Lesseux, for example?' said he, resting his finger upon the page and looking at his notes intently.

'No.'

'Did you ever learn any of his antecedents?'

Vane narrated the brief history Garnier had given of himself, at which Dumesnil gave a short, contemptuous laugh.

'He was in a tannery, it is true,' said he, 'but in the capacity of servant. He was then called Lesseux, and was discharged on

the suspicion, which never could be proved, of having poisoned the girl his master was engaged to. Come, read this.'

Vane took the book in agitation, and read the paragraph pointed out by Dumesnil.

'Amadis Lesseux'—the name was written in red ink—'age about fifty. Clerk in the tannery of M. Garnier, aux Andelys, Eure, 1845-9. Tried at Rouen, 1850, for the poisoning of Lénore Lucas, the betrothed of M. Garnier, to whom he had secretly made love. Acquitted in the absence of conclusive evidence. Employed in secret police, 1851; and since remained in the pay of Napoleon III., chiefly engaged in watching the refugees in London. Discovered January, 1870, having taken the name of his former master, who died 1853. Photograph secured. Tall; gentlemanly in appearance and behaviour; a tolerably good artist in oil and water-colours. Member of the Order of Jesus.'

Vane closed the book in silence.

'A deep dodge, taking the name of his former employer,' said Dumesnil. 'I remember how that fogged us. It was only by accident we discovered that he was not M. Garnier, but the clerk who had wronged him.'

‘But there is still the possibility of mistake, despite the parallel circumstances.’

‘We can prove that. Will you give me the book for one minute? Thank you.’

Dumesnil opened one of the pockets, and took out a dozen photographs.

‘Will you look at these, and see if you recognise one of the portraits?’

Dumesnil put the photographs in Vane’s hand.

‘I know that man,’ said Vane, selecting one, and holding it up directly his eyes fell upon it.

‘Turn it over,’ said Dumesnil.

Vane turned the carte, and saw written across the back, in red ink, ‘AMADIS LESSEUX (GARNIER)—*mouchard* and Jesuit.’



CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD FRIENDS.

SIR ANDREW AVELING had done all that justice and generosity demanded of him. He had sent a cheque to John Morrison's daughter, in expiation of the injury he had unwittingly done the man; he had sent another to Richard Vane, in aid of the institution which he and his sister had formed; and he had taken the opportunity of a man being summoned for drunk and disorderly behaviour in the 'Aveling Arms' public-house to deprive James Ledger, the landlord, of his licence—a piece of retributive justice which the ex-gamekeeper deeply resented, but dared not appeal against. His cheques were accepted, although that sent to Folly had not been

presented. 'That man' Ledger declared himself a ruined man. Roland never left the Hall. In health the baronet had never felt better. Yet still he was ill at ease. He was alarmed by the symptoms which Roland exhibited.

'How are you this morning, my boy?' he asked one morning in December when they met in the breakfast-room at Aveling Hall.

'Very well, dad; how goes it with you?' answered Roland, grasping the offered hand.

'I'm always well; but you, Roley? you're not the thing.'

'What makes you think so, sir?' Roland asked, with a smile.

'You don't whistle and sing when you're dressing as you used to. Bless me! the place was unbearable at one time for the racket you made.'

'It is time I knew better than to disturb you, sir.'

'Disturb me at nine o'clock in the morning! Rubbish! A fine open morning like this you ought to have been down at seven, and cursing the groom for laziness; down in the buttery for a quarter of an hour with a beaker

of fresh ale and whatever snacks you could find to eat, up in the saddle and away over Bagshot before the sun had melted the rime off the brake.'

'I'll certainly follow your prescription to-morrow; it sounds pleasant.'

'Be careful, Roley. I don't know that early rising is altogether right for you. Perhaps lying in bed an hour later would do just as well. Be careful.'

'I shall do nothing rashly.'

'That's right; not that I want you to coddle yourself, you know. In fact it is these cursed regular habits that I want to get you out of. They're playing the deuce with your constitution—producing what our ancestors called "the vapours." Now, I would have you up at five one morning and in bed till midday the next.'

'Well, sir, we will have a canter together after breakfast if it is agreeable to you.'

'You know I should like nothing better; though why you should always stick by my side I cannot tell. The roan's a good mare, but she cannot carry me as if I were your weight.'

'You go quite fast enough for me, dad.'

'More's the pity, more's the pity. It is

not well for a young fellow of your age to ride like a parish doctor or a cockney tradesman. I'd have you go off on the sly with my favourite mare, and come home on foot with the coat torn off your back, a hang-dog look on your face, and "Oh, sir, I'm very sorry, but I've broken the mare's neck," or some such story as that. Why, from the time you first learnt to sit in the saddle till you left college, there was not a vacation passed without your getting into some scrape or other with your recklessness ; and now——'

Sir Andrew finished his sentence with a shrug and a sigh.

'One cannot always be a boy.'

'A man shouldn't have a grave thought in his head till he's—till he's about fifty.'

The baronet had been about to say 'till he's married,' but seeing Roland wince, had taken the timely reminder of a fact which he wished always to ignore.

'A man's likely to have anything but a cheerful old age who reserves all his serious questions till then,' said Roland, laughing.

'Young fellows of the present age are apt to regard life in a too serious spirit. Good gracious me, what sort of an old man should

I be if I had taken the troubles and worries of existence as matters of consequence ! Take this advice from me, my boy—don't think about the disagreeable things of life ; just turn your back on them and look at something more pleasant. Somebody said somewhere something to the effect that he laughed to prevent himself from crying. That is precisely my idea.'

Roland might have retorted to this excellent advice, which needed only the possibility of practical application, that some one else somewhere says something about the apprehension of the good giving only the greater feeling to the worse ; but he had not outgrown the boyish sentiment of filial respect, and regarded his father's utterances as only less oracular than Sir Andrew himself believed them to be. It is difficult at all times to see the faults of those we love.

'Now, look at me : I am a standing illustration of my principle. I take things easy—I do not let anything trouble me for two hours together. When other men would be tearing their hair, I laugh ; instead of lying awake bothering my head with things that are done and can't be helped, I sleep and forget them ; and the result is that here

at seventy I am as careless and light-hearted as a lad of seventeen.'

'Yours is a happy disposition.'

'And it grieves me that yours is less so, my boy. It grieves me more than I can tell you.'

'Don't let that distress you, sir.'

'Ah, but it does distress me, and it will distress me.' I defy any man with a heart not to suffer if he sees his son unhappy. Not a wink of sleep did I get till after the bell at Tangleby had struck five—where are my tablets? I'll make a note that that confounded clock shall be stopped.'

'I shall try to forget my mistakes, and you, dad, mustn't take my affairs to heart. I am a little morbid at times, perhaps.'

'Morbid! Not you; it isn't in the family to be morbid. You have enough to rack your heart if any young fellow has; and pray don't do me the injustice to think that I can see you in distress and not take it to heart. Why, what a mean, selfish, unfeeling creature would he be who overlooked it! I assure you there's not an hour passes without my thinking over the misfortunes of our lives, and blaming myself for the share that I have made to fall upon you.' The

tender-hearted old gentleman's eyes filled with tears.

‘Come, dad, don’t talk like that,’ said Roland, putting his hand tenderly on Sir Andrew’s arm.

‘God bless you, my boy ; God bless you !’ said the baronet, wiping his eyes with the soft handkerchief Roland had brought from his pocket. ‘Well, well, this brings us back to where we started, and I say you don’t look well at all, and when a man’s not well he exaggerates trifling difficulties into enormous evils. Of course there’s nothing seriously the matter with you mentally or physically. Everything is going on as well as possible, only this regular life doesn’t agree with young spirits. You want diversion, change, excitement, and you must have it. Now, what do you say to running down to the South for a couple of months ?’

‘Do you wish to go ?’

‘No, Roley ; that would be just as bad as stopping at home with me, trotting about the lanes and visiting the slow-going families. You must go without anything to remind you of restriction ; and besides, I cannot leave the Hall. There’s likely to be some very knotty points for the bench to consider after

Christmas ; the labouring classes will get drunk at this season of the year, and I can tell you, my lad, you have to go to Coke and read deeply to administer the law impartially in these difficult cases.'

' Unless you wish to go, I shall certainly stay at home. I have accepted Brown's estimate for the new cottages in Sandy Lane, and I am too interested in them to be away during their construction.'

Sir Andrew gave a sigh of relief. ' Christmas without you would be dull for me, now that I am used to seeing your face every day,' he said.

So Roland did not go to the South, but busied himself in the erection of the cottages in Sandy Lane, and there Vane found him, with a big book on architecture sticking from his pocket, and a plumb-line in his hand.

' Have I permission to enter the works ?' asked Vane, coming upon him unseen.

' My dear old fellow,' cried Roland, turning quickly at the sound of the familiar voice, and facing his old friend. Down went the plumb-line, and the two grasped hands.

Roland at once launched into the subject of architecture, and completely bewildered Vane

with the quantity of technical terms and statistical facts he forced upon him in the first ten minutes. He listened gravely, however, and gave his opinion in serious terms. Indeed he rejoiced so greatly in Roland's enthusiasm and earnest application to a rational occupation of his time and money, that he had no thought to devote to the amusing side of his mood.

'You're doing a good thing, and you're doing it well,' he said; 'it doesn't need a bishop to give his blessing to this undertaking, Roley; you'll find it falling upon you like rain on the drooping herbage.'

'You make me happy, Dick; my heart beats like a girl's.'

'And how many cottages are you going to set up here?'

'Half-a-dozen; but they're not all. I'm going over the whole estate. There shan't be left a single one of those fever-dens that have been given for the habitation of poor toiling folks. I'll have 'em all down. And when I've seen to the labourers I shall tackle the farmers' grievances. I have told the dad I will lessen his labours on the bench; and so I will, if decent treatment can keep men from poverty and crime.'

‘Go it, young ’ne,’ said Vane, smiling, and clapping the enthusiast on the back.

‘If I can help it, blankets and soup shall be an unnecessary charity at the Hall this time next year.’

‘That’s it.’

‘And men and women shan’t be compelled to attend Tangley Church in order to get a loaf of bread. They shall worship God how they please, and have their bread all the same.’

‘Well said, Roley.’

‘And I’ve turned the missionary box out of the church, and stuck another there for a reading-room; and there shall be another there for a cricket club when the summer comes.’

The ex-vicar of Tangley gasped for breath as these radical announcements came from the mouth of this babe.

‘How does my successor take your arrangements?’

‘He’s as huffish as he can be — principally because I don’t listen to his sermons.’

‘Why, have you left off your Sunday devotions?’ Vane asked, with sudden gravity.

‘I haven’t. Only I go to Woking Church by preference.’

‘Why?’

‘Oh, Dick! need you ask? I can never enter the church week-days without looking at the empty pulpit where your sweet old face used to gleam out in the summer twilight without a sigh, and then I look at the pew where Madge sat listening with worshipful eyes turned upon you, and my heart aches. I could no more sit through a service delivered by a stranger from your pulpit than I could go down to the vicarage and see that pretty parson with his stiff-backed sisters sitting in the room that you and Madge have hallowed. Oh, Dick! those old, old days, with their calm, sweet evenings, all holy and still, when I think of them I feel as if I must just hide my face somewhere and cry.’

They had left Sandy Lane, and were walking through the pine-woods together. Vane with his gentle voice gave his friend comfort and peace of heart.

‘I was just too happy in the old days; that was my misfortune. Had I known unhappiness then, how different might all have been. Fancy——’ Roland checked himself, and asked in silent thought, ‘What right have I to think of Madge?’

Soon after he said in a voice untouched with emotion :

‘Have you heard anything of my wife?’

‘No,’ answered Vane. ‘She said she was about to leave England, and undoubtedly she has. Possibly she is in Paris; that would explain our hearing nothing of her.’

‘The cheque my father sent has never been presented.’

Vane did not answer.

‘He has ceased to love Folly,’ he said to himself.

They were both silent for a while; then Roland, in hesitating, faltering accents, said :

‘I have not mentioned your sister’s name, but you know, Dick, that I want to know about her.’

‘She is better than she has been. But London does not suit her, and she will have to give up the nursery, at any rate for a time.’

‘Has she any—any plans for the future, Dick?’

‘None that one may think of as definitely probable.’

‘What do you mean, old fellow?’

‘She has received an offer of marriage.’

Vane felt the arm linked within his quivering as if with cold ; but he proceeded upon his old plan of ‘ having it out,’ and said, ‘ Before the siege the offer was made her, and her answer was to have been given in October, but the man was unable to leave Paris.’

‘ Would she have accepted, do you think ?’

‘ Yes, I believe so.’

‘ Is he a very good fellow ?’

‘ I don’t know ; I shall have to find that out when the siege is raised.’

‘ Shall you go to Paris ?’

‘ That is quite probable, though not for this particular reason. Still, I believe I shall go.’

‘ And—she—your sister ?’

‘ Will go with me.’

‘ And if the man is good she will marry him ?’

‘ Yes ; I think so.’

‘ What kind of a man is he ?’ Roland asked, after a pause.

‘ You know him—Amadis.’

‘ Amadis Garnier ?’ exclaimed Roland in astonishment not unmingled with contempt, for he had pictured a handsome, fine-spirited young fellow such as Margaret deserved. A

moment, and then, hanging his head, he said :

‘ Well, he is a truer man than I have been. May God bless and make her happy !’



CHAPTER XIX.

THE OLD FRIENDS PART.

QUENE evening early in January, 1871, Richard Vane received a visit from two Frenchmen: one, Dumesnil, the man who had given him information respecting Amadis Garnier; the other, a slight, dark man with long thin fingers, whom Dumesnil introduced as Jacques Poirot.

‘Citizen Jacques Poirot is of our society,’ said Dumesnil. ‘He arrived in London this afternoon, having left Paris by balloon last Thursday. Besides important information for our president, he brings a letter for you which he is instructed to deliver into your hands.’

‘You are Richard Vane?’ asked M. Poirot.

‘Yes; I am he,’ replied Vane, giving his hand.

Poirot grasped it; and, having interchanged the signs by which members of the brotherhood recognised one another, he took a case from his pocket and produced a thin packet which he handed to Vane.

‘We will leave you to read your letter,’ said Dumesnil. ‘We shall meet again to-morrow night—perhaps earlier if events should call for a meeting before then. We have important news which must be delivered at once to our president. It is certain that the provisional government will surrender Paris before the end of the month; a convention may even now be made. The enemies of the Republic and of progress have the reins in their hand. It is clear that all for which France has fought for since Sedan will be lost unless her patriot children and her earnest friends stand firm in her defence. What course we shall take will be decided to-morrow, but it behoves us all to prepare to enter Paris the moment a line of communication is opened.’

‘I am ready,’ replied Vane.

He led his visitors to the door, and return-

ing to the room sat down with the unopened letter in his hand, and there rested with his eyes bent upon the ground, absorbed in grave reflection. Curiosity and personal concern aroused by the first sight of a letter from the beleaguered city were forgotten in the more widely important subject of a people's welfare. The voice of his sister Margaret reminded him of the individual interests involved in the political crisis.

'May I come in?' she asked, peeping into the room through the half-opened door.

'Yes, Madge, I am alone,' he replied, holding out his hand—a readily understood signal that he wished to talk to her.

She took his hand, and drawing a seat beside his chair, sat by him, still holding his hand.

'Dumesnil has been here with a friend who escaped from Paris by balloon,' Vane said. 'He brings confirmation of our fears; the provisional government of Paris is about to capitulate to the Prussians.'

'I shall be so grateful when all this terrible fighting is ended,' said Madge, with a sigh. 'It may be humiliating to admit a foreign enemy into the city, but that is surely better than sacrificing so many lives merely to de-

lay what is believed to be an inevitable calamity. In your heart, Dick dear, weren't you glad to hear the news ?

'I cannot say that I was, Madge. But that is not the question which we must discuss. We have to think, dear, of the personal liabilities to which this coming event will expose us. I must be in readiness to enter Paris the moment that railway communication is opened.'

'You said weeks since it might be so. The poor unhappy people who have suffered hunger and the loss of home, and those still more unfortunate who have lost all that made home lovable and hardships easy to bear—brothers, fathers, and lovers—they will indeed need sympathy and tenderness.'

Vane made no reply : he foresaw that the easier tasks of mercy must wait until the sterner work was finished.

'It will be quite easy to find a lady to do my duties,' Margaret continued ; 'and you have only to give me an hour's notice and I shall be ready.'

'Then you have made up your mind to accompany me ?' said Vane, sighing.

'Don't you wish me to ?' Madge asked, in a tone of surprise and anxiety.

‘ There are reasons why I could wish you to stay in England—at least for a while.’

‘ What reasons ?’

‘ It is possible there may be trouble yet in Paris. Such a government as that which now exists is not what France has bled for, and it may be necessary to replace it by another which represents more truly the feeling of the people.’

‘ You think there will be an *émeute*, and that I could not bear the shock of such sights as those which must meet our eyes in the streets. I am a coward, I know ; yet I could sit indoors with the old women and children and make lint for the wounded, though I dare not go amongst them, as you, I know, will.’

‘ That is not all I may have to do, Madge dear.’

‘ You will persuade them all you can to refrain from fighting ?’

‘ It may not be possible to avoid fighting.’

‘ But you, Richard—your duties will not imperil your safety ?’

‘ If I am called upon to take arms I shall obey.’

‘ Oh, my brother !’

Margaret clasped Vane’s arm in her

strenuous embrace, looking up into his face in silent supplication for a while ; then, as he was about to speak, she stopped him, as if to check the course he meant to take, and in a thousand broken sentences, rapidly uttered, and mingled with her rising sobs, she implored him to revoke his words, to discard the resolution he had adopted, to seek another path of duty, and preserve his life for greater services to humanity. She reasoned with all the force of her ardent feelings, striving to convince him that he overstrained the sense of duty. She dared not pause, knowing that his answer would be final and decisive, and feeling too surely that her appeal would be useless. When at length she ceased, looking still upwards into his face through her tear-filled eyes, he said, drawing her trembling form nearer to him :

‘You have urged no argument so strong as that which I have had to overcome. My Madge, do you think I forgot you? I did not resolve to give my life for liberty until I had subdued the temptation to renounce duty for the sake of my affection. Now you know why for some reasons I wish you not to accompany me. If I should fall——’

‘Oh, I cannot think of that!’ exclaimed Margaret, wringing her hands in agony.

‘But it is a possibility we must not overlook.’

‘I can only look upon it as a reason stronger than all others why I should go with you. Only one thing shall separate us,’ she said; and stopped, feeling a deadly chill at the heart.

When Vane was again alone he turned his thoughts to the yet unopened packet. With Madge yet in his mind, his thoughts turned towards Garnier. He hoped there might be an enclosure from him; yet, fearing to find only a confirmation of those imputations already laid against his character, he was pleased that Margaret knew nothing of it.

Refusing to consider Garnier guilty until he had been given the opportunity of proving himself innocent, Vane had said nothing to Margaret about Dumesnil’s revelation. He had never seen Garnier’s handwriting, and the address upon the envelope might have been his, being particularly fine and neat. Opening the envelope he took out a single side of thin paper and looked down it; the letter was in the same small neat hand, but at the

foot in large letters was the signature, 'Folly.' Vane's heart leaped. He read :

'Paris, Hôtel Milan, Carrefour de l'Europe, St. Lazare,
'January 14th, 1871.

'SIR,

'Our city is in great trouble. We have the Prussians without, famine within. Our necessities of our life they grow more large every day. In especially our poor suffer: many have taken refuge here with our good Madame Avenet, whose home in the quartier of St. Sulpice is no longer but ruins. But our good ladies cannot relieve all, and how the poor creatures with no homes, no works, and no money, linger alive, the good God alone knows, with the commonest kind of meat at twelve francs the half kilo, and now no person may buy more than ten ounces of bread a day. It is dreadful. But the siege is soon to be all over, we are told. My child, as I privilege myself to call Mrs. Aveling, has given all that she has to the poor *misérables*. She is as good the woman as she is good the dancer, and, remembering ever your goodness, she makes use of the opportunity now presented to send you a cheque, which she wishes you to buy with all the

good things readily used as you can, and to send them by the first conveyance permitted to enter Paris.

‘ With very great respect, sir,

‘ I am yours truly,

‘ G. ESPERENZA.

‘ P.S.—My child begs me to write these words : “ I have not done right always since I left you, dear, dear friend. It is not easy, but I try my hardest. Good-bye, dear friend.

“ FOLLY.” ’

Looking in the envelope he found the cheque sent to Folly long ago by Sir Andrew Aveling. In Esperenza’s hand it was filled up for the amount of £1,000.

After a little consideration, Vane went to his desk and wrote :

‘ 53, Church Street, Spitalfields,

‘ January 21st, 1871.

‘ MY DEAR ROLEY,

‘ I enclose a letter from your wife which I have this evening received. You will be glad to see that our hopes for her are in part fulfilled. I also send the cheque. Folly has not yet learned the value of money, and I feel sure that Sir Andrew will be glad to alter the sum she has written for one more

in accordance with his own expectation and desires.

‘It is quite likely I shall myself accompany the stores, and in that case Margaret will also leave England. Come and bid us both farewell, dear lad.

‘DICK.’

He read again Folly’s postscript to Esperenza’s letter, and then, folding the sheet, enclosed it with the cheque in his own note to Roland.

Again and again he repeated her words to himself with tender sympathy. The path of duty had not been thornless to him.

* * * * *

The brother and sister had just finished their tea the following evening when a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Roland Aveling. Whatever anticipations of constraint he had anticipated vanished as he took Margaret’s hand and looked into her face. Earnest concern for her, a yearning desire to make her happy, were the only feelings in his heart; and as she read them through his eyes, Madge forgot that he had deceived her, neglected her, forsaken her, and given his heart to another. To both it

seemed as if they were awakening from a long, long troubled sleep, to find only that they were older than when their eyes closed upon the happy days gone by.

‘We didn’t expect you so soon, Roland,’ said Vane.

‘Your letter was brought to me in the fields; I just handed it over to the dad, who was with me, and rode off to the station,’ answered Roland, with an apologetic glance at his dress.

He wore his riding-jacket, breeches, and gaiters, and a corner of the work on architecture protruded from his pocket.

‘You are still busy?’

‘Yes, yes; the work goes on capitally, though we had to stop a while during the hard weather in December.’

Roland spoke mechanically; he was saying to himself, ‘How pale she is—how pale!’

‘Will you eat something?’

‘No, Dick, no. You shall just walk back with me to the station, if you will. I came to say “Good-bye,” and that’s enough for me to do just now. Madge,’ he said, turning round and addressing her unconsciously by the old familiar name, ‘I am just the same awkward fellow I was as a boy; I can’t find suitable

words for what I feel ; but I am not careless nor thoughtless either, and I wish you to accept the truest wishes of my heart for your good.'

'I can accept nothing so gratefully,' Margaret faltered.

He tried to speak, but failed. 'How pale she is—how pale!' were the only words his thoughts could frame. The tears came to his eyes and choked his voice. He held out his hand, and all that he could say was 'Farewell!'

'Farewell,' answered Margaret, scarcely less agitated.

Their hands touched and severed, and so they parted.

'I broke the young bud ruthlessly,' thought Roland, 'and the first blossom is destroyed; but a second may grow to bless a tenderer hand.'

Vane talked as he walked beside Roland to Waterloo ; his companion was silent all the way, though he wished to speak. As he sat in the carriage and the train was about to move, he said :

'I have been able to think of nothing, and I can say nothing now, dear Dick, save this—may God bless you!'

‘Why, that includes all that one could wish or say, and so God bless you, too,’ answered Vane.

Then their hands clung together and separated—clung together and separated for the last time.



CHAPTER XX.

FOLLY'S LIFE IN PARIS.

IN the morning of the succeeding day Vane received a letter from Sir Andrew, in which the baronet thanked him for his consideration; and in returning Señor Esperenza's letter, with a fresh cheque, begged him to draw freely if he required more money for his philanthropic purposes. The new cheque was for ten thousand pounds.

Taking Dumesnil's advice as to the things which would be the most acceptable to the starving poor of Paris, Vane got together his stores, and made such arrangements that he could at any moment leave England.

Among the first strangers that entered Paris were Richard Vane and his sister. He

had stuffed two portmanteaus with comestibles, and these were emptied before he was off the steps of the St. Lazare Station. The crowd pressed upon them, men and women pushing each other savagely aside to get near. In the outskirts of the mob stood an old man with a young woman.

‘We will get away, my child,’ said the old man; ‘see how wildly they struggle! News from Chanzy or Bourbaki, perhaps. Let us go no nearer; you will be crushed.’

‘No, no!’ exclaimed the girl, with great excitement. ‘It is he—don’t you see him on the steps there? It is he!’

With these words she left the old man, and throwing herself into the crowd, pushed and wound her way towards the steps. The women opposed her. ‘You have not hunger,’ said they; but the men made way for her, and helped her along, so that presently she got within the circle where Vane stood with his sister and his empty portmanteaus.

She clasped his arm with her two hands, giving a little dove-like coo of delight.

‘Folly!’ he exclaimed, turning to her.

She cooed again.

‘Did you expect me?’ he asked, taking

her hand and holding it with delight thrilling through his veins.

She nodded, according to her old habitude; and then, catching sight of Margaret for the first time, she shrank away so that Richard stood between them.

‘Madge, here is Folly. You have seen her before. Come——’

He held up Folly’s hand and drew her forward significantly.

It was no time for consideration, and Margaret, obeying the tacit command of her brother, took Folly’s hand in hers. The touch seemed to have a magical effect upon Folly; it was to her an offer of forgiveness which she eagerly accepted. She pressed Margaret’s cold hand fervently, and raising her pretty face, kissed her pale cheek.

The crowd, finding there was nothing more to be had, dispersed like a flock of hungry poultry.

‘The goods will not arrive for some time,’ Vane said to Folly. ‘I have left a man in the bureau who will bring word when the train arrives. I have told him he will find me at the Hôtel de Milan.’

‘Then you intended to see me?’ Folly asked.

‘Yes. I want your help in distributing the things bought with your money. You know more about the poor of Paris than I do. Where is the hotel?’

‘Quite near. And may I help you? I know where the poor are to be found, and I shall never get tired. Let me carry one of those portmanteaus; and see, here comes Esperenza, he shall carry the other.’

In her eagerness she had taken up one of the cases and was beckoning eagerly to Esperenza.

‘There are lots of poor fellows here wanting work. I can’t let you take the business out of their hands,’ said Vane, smiling.

Folly gave up the portmanteau with reluctance, and then went through the form of introducing Esperenza, who had come to her side, in her own peculiar manner.

‘This is Esperenza, and this is Miss Vane,’ said she.

‘And who am I, Folly?’ asked Vane.

‘There is no need to tell Esperenza who you are. He can see that you are Richard Vane.’

They walked to the Carrefour de l’Europe by the Rue d’Amsterdam and the Rue de Moscou. Margaret with Señor Esperenza,

and Folly with Richard Vane, following. Folly never felt more grateful to the old ballet-master than when he offered his arm to Margaret and took the lead along the narrow *trottoir*; she closed up to Vane's side, and timidly, yet with warm gladness, slipped her hand under his arm. A long vista of delight seemed opened up to her, and the prospect intoxicated her with delight. She felt as though she must laugh or cry in her great happiness.

'Were you surprised to hear from me?' she asked after a time.

'Yes. And yet I thought you were in Paris.'

'Because you did not hear from me before?'

'Yes.'

'I am so glad.'

'Why?'

'Because that shows you knew I should not forget you. For some time I dared not send you a message, and then when I wished to tell you what I thought I was unable to. I could not write, and I would not tell even dear old *Esperenza* what I felt. Then I was dreadfully troubled, fearing you would think me ungrateful or forgetful, and I wanted just

to tell you that I was trying hard to do right, but the city was blockaded and I could send no letter to you. But you knew that I lo—that I never ceased to think of you, didn't you ?

‘ Yes.’

A happy little sigh rose from Folly's heart. After a moment's pause, she said, turning her face to him :

‘ Do you think I look better ?—I don't mean prettier, but sweeter and gentler ?’

How could he reply ? Looking at her face, pink with pleasure, her pretty lips curved in a tender smile, her great eyes dark and lustrous as a fawn's, yet glowing with a woman's strenuous love, he felt that he had never seen anything to equal its sweet gentleness.

But she was the wife of his friend, and he was bound to check rather than encourage the love which he knew too well was throbbing in her bosom.

‘ You were never wanting in sweetness or gentleness,’ he said, taking his eyes from her beauty. ‘ Come, tell me about yourself, and what you have been doing here.’

‘ Right from the beginning ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ You told me I could do good by amusing people, and so I went to the theatre with quite different feelings, and all the time I played I was thinking of what you had told me, and trying my very best to satisfy the audience. But somehow it was less easy than playing to amuse myself, and not half so successful. I think I must have looked grave and anxious at times, and my carefulness caused me to make mistakes which I had never made before. In the old time, if I did anything that was not in my part I could laugh it off, dance it off, and make the people more pleased than if I had made no error at all ; but when I became anxious to do well, the slightest mistake made me lose my self-possession. Do you see ?’

‘ Yes. I can understand that quite well.’

‘ Of course you can ; but the stupid old manager couldn’t. He said the piece had run too long, and the audience were tired of it. I knew otherwise, and so I gave up my engagement and I determined to come here, for London seemed to me just like a great graveyard, where all that had made me happy was dead and buried. I went to the theatre where *Esperenza* was engaged, and told him to find me an engagement. He wanted me

to dance—dance, and no more ; but I wanted to make people laugh, and to give them enjoyment, just as in the old time with “ Andromeda.” It wasn’t difficult to get an engagement. I’m prettier than the French girls, and my name was well known. But I wouldn’t wear the dresses they bought for me, and the costumes I had made, though they were just as nice as the “ Andromeda ” dresses, didn’t please anyone except the women, who were jealous of me. And I did my best to succeed. I made Esperenza sit up night after night hearing my part, until the poor old man fell asleep ; but it was all to no purpose. I failed. Then I gave up the stage and went to church. After going every day for some time I thought it would be the most beautiful thing in the world to live always a religious life, and wear a nasty, ugly dress and a great unbecoming thing on my head. So I went to a religious house and tried that—for ten days—and I ran away quite mad. And I said in a rage—I said——’ she paused.

‘ Well, Folly ?’

‘ I said, “ There is no happiness in religion, there is no happiness in being good. I will try to be good no more.” I said that.’

‘Poor soul!’ thought Vane.

‘I couldn’t help it,’ Folly continued, ‘I was mad; and it was the misery of wearing ugly clothes, and trying to sing though my nose, and those horrid priests, that made me so.’

‘You were trying to do an impossible thing, Folly.’

‘Yes. But I was a fool, and I didn’t know it. I could only see that I had tried to do right and failed when stupid girls succeeded. I wouldn’t go near Esperenza. I used to walk about the streets all day and sit in the deserted avenue between the Champs de Mars and the Pont d’Alma at night. I used to wish to throw myself in the river; but I had been in the Morgue and seen there a drowned woman, and the fear of becoming so dreadful kept me from suicide—that and something else.’

‘What else?’

‘I will tell you. Why should I keep any secrets? When I felt that temptation to end my life, I used to repeat your name again and again—Richard Vane, Richard Vane, Richard Vane—like that. They were terrible nights. I do not know how long I endured that misery—it seemed to me an

age ; yet it couldn't have been more than ten or twelve days. One night instead of going to the Quai d'Orsay I went on to the Boulevard des Italiens, and sat down by a table before a *café*. I told the *garçon* to bring me a *café* ; some one came to my side and asked me to drink champagne instead. I saw no reason to refuse, and I like champagne. It amused me to speak to some one after being silent so long, and the man talked cheerfully ; but he offered me a rudeness, and I took up my glass and cut his face with it. He had me taken by a gendarme to the prefecture, and that cured me, for though I was dismissed without punishment, the thought that you might come to hear of the affair filled me with terror. I said to myself, " He will think that I am utterly bad and ungrateful, and that all his kindness has been thrown away upon me." Then I went back to Esperenza, who was in great trouble, not knowing what had become of me, and I told him everything. He is a kind, good old man, and listened to all I said, just as if I had been his daughter, without laughing at my silliness or scolding me for what I had done. He pointed out my mistake, and advised me to try again at the theatre, contenting my-

self with doing the little I could do. It was not too late ; he got me another engagement, and I just danced like an ordinary girl. But the old life was welcome to me, though I merely took part with other girls in the ballet ; it was such a change from the gloomy days in the religious house, and the dreadful nights of solitude I had endured. The music and the lights and colour and the exercise of dancing made me forget, and charmed me ; so unconsciously I excelled all the other girls, and pleased without trying to please. The manager gave me a part, and so once more I took the first place on the stage as a dancer, and my misery left me. *Esperenza* told me that was what you wished and intended, and I believed him ; and we were right, were we not ?

‘ Yes, Folly. The only work that we can succeed in is that which we can do well, and with pleasure.’

‘ One has to learn all that by experience, if one is only an ignorant girl,’ sighed Folly ; then, with a bright smile and cheerful accent, ‘ But that is all over now ; the hard lesson is learnt.’

‘ When did you return to the theatre ?’

‘ In November. Many have been closed

during the siege. The people have been too unhappy to seek relief in amusement. Those of us who could afford it played for nothing.'

'And have you found new friends?'

'Esperenza—he is scarcely a new friend—has been my constant friend. I like Madame Avenet at the hotel; she is quite a good woman; and I have got on better with the women of the theatre here than I did at the Levity. You see we all hated the Prussians so deeply that we liked each other by contrast. We joined together and made a solemn promise to fight side by side with the soldiers in the streets if the enemy passed the gates, and we paid a wounded soldier to teach us how to use the gun. Every night after the performance we used to go to the walls to learn what had happened during the evening. A good part of the day we girls spent in the hospitals. So you see we hadn't much time to think of ourselves and our own little piques and jealousies. Then provisions became short, and the poor suffered from want of food and fire. The weather has been dreadful, and fuel too dear for the needy to buy. Weeks ago there were whole streets of houses where the men and women lay too feeble to bury their dead children. God only

knows how they have fared since. They, too, may be dead. While we had something to give we could visit them ; but our dresses and trinkets are all sold and our money spent, and we cannot go to them with empty hands like the priests.'

Deeply moved by what he heard, Vane replied with emotion :

'You shall soon go among them again like an angel.'



CHAPTER XXI.

SECRET SERVICE.

VANE and his sister had been at the Hôtel de Milan more than a month, and as yet had seen nothing of Amadis Garnier. Vane's name had appeared frequently in the journals, so that one wishing to find him might have done so with little difficulty. Vane was forced to the conclusion that either Garnier was not in Paris or feared to face the enemies of the Empire he had served. The latter possibility was suggested by Dumesnil, who with the rest of the Federal society had followed Vane from England.

It was a week after the establishment of the Commune that the *garçon*, coming to the apartment where Vane sat with Margaret, an-

nounced that Monsieur Amadis Garnier waited in the *salle* below, and wished to see Mr. Vane.

Margaret put down the work on which she was engaged, and looked anxiously at her brother. They had spoken seldom of Amadis Garnier since their arrival. He had told her that a charge had been brought against their friend which he wished him to answer before she saw him, and she had readily promised to avoid an interview, without displaying any desire to know what the charge was which Garnier had to rebut. Her apathy Vane rightly construed as a sign of her disinclination to the proposed marriage—a disinclination which had grown out of recent events.

As the *garçon* left the room, Vane rose and said :

‘ If Garnier returns with me and claims an answer to his proposal, you will reply as your sentiment towards him guides you, and without reference to expediency or anything in the world but your own true feelings.’

‘ I shall not be a burden to you, shall I, dear ?’ she asked.

‘ My Madge !’ Vane exclaimed, bending his lips down to Margaret’s smooth hair. ‘ You shall be such a burden as the honeysuckle is, and no more.’

He took his hat and ran down to the *salle*, where Garnier met him with effusive politeness.

‘I learn that Miss Vane is here,’ he said, in conclusion. ‘It is no more than one might expect, and yet one is surprised by the heroism of such a delicate creature venturing to enter Paris in such a time of trouble.’

Vane bowed coldly, and then said :

‘Garnier, do you know a man named Anatole Dumesnil?’

‘A man of about sixty-five years, with white hair—a very excitable, quick man, and a member of the Federal society which has the honour of including you amongst its members—is that he?’

‘That is he. Have you any objection to meeting him?’

‘None whatever. I hear that he is a good citizen.’

‘Then I must ask you to come with me to his rooms at once. He has laid charges against you which you should meet at once.’

‘Certainly. Poor old fellow, I am not surprised. We will visit him immediately, if you please.’

They were fortunate in finding Dumesnil in his apartment. He received Vane with

warmth, to Garnier he merely gave a frowning nod of recognition. Vane without delay stated the object of their visit.

‘It is lucky for you, Lesseux,’ said Dumesnil, ‘that I meet you here for the first time since the Commune has come into power; had I met you in the streets I should have openly denounced you, and left you to the rough justice of the people.’

‘Citizen Dumesnil, I have come here by the invitation of Mr. Vane, to answer charges made against me in my absence, not to listen to threats.’

‘I charge you first with being a liar,’ said the old man, sternly.

Garnier shrugged his shoulders, and Dumesnil continued:

‘You call yourself Amadis Garnier, and pretend that you were once the proprietor of a *tannerie* in Les Andelys, from which you retired on account of losing Lenore Lucas, to whom you were betrothed. I say that your name is Lesseux, that you were a servant of Amadis Garnier, and were tried at Rouen for the murder of the girl to whom your master was betrothed.

‘My reply to that is simple. You are mistaken. If you will produce your evidence

I may be able to explain how your wrong impression arose.'

'The evidence is in *Les Andelys*, and in asking for it you know well enough that it is impossible to procure it with the means of communication stopped.'

'I think you had better proceed to your second charge,' said Garnier with imperturbable coolness.

'That is comprehensive enough: I accuse you of having been in the pay of Napoleon, and of being a spy and an enemy of the Republic.'

'Will you trouble yourself to read this?' Garnier asked, taking a folded paper from his pocket and handing it to Dumesnil.

The old man took it between his finger and thumb, and opened it as if fearing to soil his fingers; then he read the formal letter appointing Citizen Amadis Garnier to a position of trust under the committee of public safety.

'Idiots!' he exclaimed, throwing the letter upon the table.

'That is hardly the proper language for a friend of the Republic?' Garnier remarked.

'Does the committee know that you served Napoleon?'

‘Yes ; and it considers that in consequence I am better able to serve them.’

‘But you never avowed the fact until the dynasty fell.’

‘I should not have been faithful to the cause I then believed in had I proclaimed a secret it was my duty to keep.’

‘Ah !’ exclaimed Dumesnil, with a grunt of contempt. ‘One question more, and I have done with you. Can you deny that you are a Jesuit ?’

‘Certainly. I have embraced the Protestant faith. My religious sentiments have changed with my political views, and both thanks to the influence of my English friends.’

Garnier bowed low to Vane.

‘I see through it all,’ cried Dumesnil, striking the table in excitement. ‘No wonder you have not been seen these last two months. You have lain in hiding, waiting to see which party would take the ascendancy and to which you should offer your allegiance. That is why you dared not show yourself to your friend here, though his presence was announced in the journals, and his residence must have been known to you through your agents. You are like the miserable accom-

plice in a crime who betrays his friends to save his own worthless existence. You have shown yourself possessed of secrets which the committee think too valuable to lose, and they shut their eyes to your baseness to profit by it. If there is a chance you will "change your views," as you call it, and betray your present supporters. You confirm rather than disprove my accusation that you are a liar and an enemy of the Republic.'

'You have placed it within my power to punish you. In slandering me you slander the Republic. I know your unhappy temperament, M. Dumesnil, and I forgive you for words uttered in excitement, which you will regret in your cooler moments.'

'Nothing will make me forgive you. I say you are a *lâche*, a spy, and a scoundrel, and if the Government will not shoot you I will. Wash the paint from your contemptible face, and there shall not appear sufficient disparity in our age to protect you from offering me a challenge. If my words are not a sufficient insult, and you wish further provocation, take it.'

And with these words Dumesnil stepped forward and slapped Garnier's face with the back of his hand.

Garnier for a moment stood speechless and trembling with rage, and possibly he might have resented the affront upon the spot had not Vane stepped between him and Dumesnil.

Composing himself as he walked to the door, Garnier turned, with his hand upon the handle, and said :

‘My religion, rather than your age, is your protection, Citizen Dumesnil. I shall do myself the honour to wait for you, Mr. Vane, when I am safe from provocation, which I find it difficult to overcome.’

‘Well, what do you think of him?’ asked Dumesnil, when Garnier had withdrawn.

‘A man is not culpable because he changes his views—especially when they are so demonstrably bad as those he held. And the facts of his early life are still unproved.’

‘Ah, bah! all the world’s mad,’ cried Dumesnil, throwing himself in a chair. ‘Do you believe in him? Do you believe that religion prevented him challenging me?’

‘Religion has led men to do stranger things than that, Dumesnil.’

‘Answer me one question, Vane, that I may know whether to believe you or not. Will you willingly suffer that man to marry your sister?’

Vane answered without hesitation :

‘No.’

When he joined Garnier in the street, he said :

‘You made a proposal of marriage to my sister ; do you intend asking her for a reply?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then you must first tell her that part of your history which she does not know.’

‘I intended doing so. I do not believe she will think worse of me for my reformation—do you?’

‘For your reformation, no. But I do not hold you guiltless.’

‘Vane, I love your sister more deeply than you imagine. It was for her sake I gave up my original faith and changed my political allegiance.’

‘That is enough,’ said Vane, stopping suddenly ; ‘we must part here. A man who makes his God and country mere instruments for gratifying his individual desire can be no friend of mine. I refuse you permission to address my sister.’

‘In that case I must address her without,’ he said quietly, and raising his hat he walked away.



CHAPTER XXII.

ADIEUX.

NOW that there was no longer any reason to doubt the truth of the accusations made against Amadis Garnier, Richard Vane told Margaret all that had occurred, and explained his reasons for objecting to any further communication with the renegade. It distressed her to learn that the man they had liked was as apostate devoid of principle. She regretted that he could no longer be welcomed as a friend, but the contingent fact that he could never be her husband was a positive relief to her mind. It disposed of a question which she had been unable to answer satisfactorily and conclusively to herself, divided as she was between an inclination to remain

unwedded and true to the man whom she yet loved, despite his infidelity to her, and a wish to act in accordance with what she believed to be her brother's desires. Her thoughts upon this subject, however, were of short duration; the imminent peril in which her brother stood occupied her mind almost exclusively.

The progress of events made it more clearly evident that the Commune of Paris would fight *à outrance*. As one after another the sorties of the Federal troops failed, the nucleus of ardent and conscientious Republicans, who gave a meaning as well as a name to the Commune, realised the fact that they, individually, were doomed men. Defeat was inevitable.

'We shall die,' said Dumesnil to Vane, 'but France will live. A despotism, which but for our resistance would now have existed, can never be restored until our protest is forgotten. Our blood shall make that protest good.'

Signs of the impending struggle were but too clearly indicated to the anxious eyes of those who had dear ones to lose. The number of barricades was increased; traffic ceased, omnibuses and voitures being overturned and

netted together as a framework for the street defence; women piled up in the window-balconies paving stones and other things to be used as missiles against the attacking Versailles. The Central Committee issued decrees daily, imposing fresh regulations upon the people for the defence of the barricades and the protection of the defenders. On the 20th and 21st of May the cannonading grew more vigorous in the direction of the Porte St. Cloud. In the afternoon of the 21st a man in a blouse, smoke-grimed, and with a sword-cut in his shoulder, came into the Carrefour de l'Europe crying out, 'To the barricades, comrades! The enemy is within the walls! *Voilà*——' and he clapped his hand on his sodden shoulder and held it up covered with blood.

Margaret, looking from the window of their apartment in the Hôtel de Milan, heard and saw this, and sank down into a chair, sick and faint. Richard had been absent since early morning—where was he?

At that moment, as if in answer to the question in her mind, she heard his quick, well-known, beloved step upon the stairs, and by the time she had risen from her seat he stood before her. The perspiration was

running down his face, and his hands were grimed with earth; he had been grubbing up stones for others to carry to the barricade on the Place Clichy.

‘A cup of tea, little Madge!’ he cried, looking at his watch, hastily. ‘I have a quarter of an hour’s respite, and ten minutes of it are to be spent with you.’

‘You shall have tea in a moment, dear,’ she replied, clinging nervously to his arm. ‘But you are hot, and—and—has anything happened?’

‘I have been hard at work with the pavement, as you see.’

He held up his hands.

‘But there has been no battle yet. No——’

‘Ah! You have heard that noisy fellow I met in the Rue St. Petersbourg. Well, if he is to be trusted, there has been an attack on the barricade at the Porte St. Cloud; but his report that the Versaillais have taken it may be doubted. These noisy excitable men generally exaggerate. The outposts have brought no report of the enemy to our barricade yet, or I shouldn’t have got leave of absence even for a few moments.’

Somewhat reassured, Madge hastened to

brew the tea, while Richard, standing where she had left him, watched her movements with yearning mournfulness. What a slight, graceful figure it was, and what a sweet, pure profile! How often, after his work, in more peaceful days, had she made him the cup that pleased his old bachelor taste! And now it was the last loving service she would render him. Sweet, fragile, dainty Madge! What sorrow lay in store for her—what bitter grief and sore trial! The traces of these reflections he concealed from her eyes, as she turned towards him, by looking again at his watch.

‘I find this watch gets rather in the way when I’m at work,’ he said, taking it off with the long chain which had been his mother’s, ‘so I’ll leave it with you, dear. And now I come to think of it, my keys are rather inconvenient—they might slip out of my pocket, and it would be awkward to lose this key of my valise. It’s a patent lock, and all my papers and things are in it. Take care of them for me, dear Madge.’

She took the keys and watch, and put them in her work-box, without suspecting his real motive in giving them up. There was a letter for her, and another for Roland,

and a third for Folly in the valise—little sentences of loving farewell that he had written the night before.

‘And now for a cup of tea,’ he said, cheerfully.

Madge filled his cup.

‘It is probable we shall have to work all night at the barricade,’ he said, as he was drinking the tea. ‘You will go to bed at the usual time, and not be alarmed if I do not return by then.’

‘Do you expect anything to happen to-night?’ Margaret asked, falteringly.

‘No.’

Margaret sighed with relief. When Richard said ‘No,’ or ‘Yes,’ she knew that he made no mental reservation. Yet it seemed to her when, at the end of ten minutes, he bade her good-bye, that his voice had not its customary clearness, that his arms clung closer to her, and his kiss was longer than usual. And he held her hand in his until he reached the door, and then he said, ‘Another kiss, little Madge, since a whole long night may separate us,’ and he kissed her quickly again and again, and went away without a word, closing the door after him as if to prevent her following. Poor Madge! left alone, she sat

down, thinking of these things as she remembers them now in every particular.

The Hôtel de Milan was a wedge-shaped building. The thin end abutted upon the Carrefour de l'Europe; along one side ran the Rue de Turin, along the other the Rue Clapeyron. The Vane's apartments faced the Rue de Turin; from the windows one could see up to the Boulevard des Batignolles and down across the Carrefour and the continuation of the Rue de Turin, towards St. Lazare. Folly's apartment faced the Carrefour. The lower floor projected considerably, so as to form a kind of terrace before her sitting-room. The terrace was about twelve feet long by ten deep, covered with zinc, and surrounded by a rail. Some evergreen shrubs in boxes were placed along the front.

It was here that Folly stood, looking pensively down into the Carrefour, her elbows resting on the rail and her face in her hands, when she heard a knock at the door of the room behind her.

'Entrez!' she called, turning her head carelessly to see who would appear. The door opened, and Richard Vane stood in the entrance. With a quick cry of sur-

prise and joy Folly ran into the room to him.

‘My friend!’ she cried, catching at his hand, and covering it with her soft palms.

‘I have scarcely five minutes,’ he said.

Folly pressed his hand closer; there was no need to relinquish it if they were so soon to part again.

‘I want you to do a service for me, Folly.’

She accepted the office with a little inarticulate sound of pleasure, and her face lit up with a glad smile.

‘I can tell you what I could not tell my sister. I am going to the barricade, and probably I shall not leave it until the fight is over.’

‘Is it true, then, that they come?’

‘Yes; the Pont du Jour gate is passed, and it is most likely that the Porte St. Cloud has yielded also. We are forbidden to leave the barricades. I do not want Margaret to know this at present.’

‘No one shall know. Is that all?’

‘No. The service I want you to perform is far heavier. I want you to protect my sister. To stay in the house with her, and protect her in my absence.’

Folly hung her head in silence. Richard

Vane regarded her changed manner in surprise.

‘She does not like me; and Madame Avenet is good and attentive; she could protect her better than I should,’ she said, still hanging her head.

‘But I would have you guard her as well. I do not ask you to be with my sister, but merely to remain here and watch over her. She is in danger. I have been warned this morning against the treacherous malevolence of the man who was once our friend—Amadis Garnier. If events should turn unfavourably against our side, he may have it in his power to do her harm. You see now why I ask your help?’

Folly remained silent and motionless.

‘Do you refuse to do me this service?’ Vane asked, astonished by the girl’s reluctance.

She looked up into his face with distress and supplication in her eyes; her lips quivered with emotion. He perceived that she hesitated from some far deeper motive than mere personal dislike to Margaret.

‘What is it?’ he asked, in a tender tone of encouragement.

Losing all control over herself, Folly threw

her arms around his neck, and burying her face in his shoulder, burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

‘I knew it would come—I knew you would fight upon the barricades—there was no help for it,’ she said, between her sobs; ‘but I did not mind that, for I said to myself, “The bullet that hits him shall pass through me, and so we shall die together.”’

‘You face the fire!’ exclaimed Vane, looking down upon the beautiful girl. ‘Do you think I could suffer that?’

‘Why not?’ she asked. ‘Can I not handle a gun well? Will not other women help at the barricades? I have been watching the little *couturière* who lives in the fifth, over the *boulangerie*, piling stones on her window-sill to hurl down, and she is only a weak little thing: and look at me!’—she stood up and held out her arms—‘I have the strength of a man, and I do not know what fear is—for myself,’ she added, her voice quavering as she looked at Vane.

‘That must not be, Folly,’ he said sadly, yet firmly. ‘You must stay here. Come, you have never disobeyed me yet. Will you not do my last request?’

‘Oh, my friend!—my darling, darling

master !' she cried, throwing herself upon his breast once more. ' Do with me what you will. Though it breaks my heart, I will do as you bid me do.'

A horse galloped over the pavement of the Carrefour, and along the broken road leading to the Place Clichy, and then a bugle sounded.

' Stay here, dear Folly,' said Vane, placing her in a seat ; ' I will think of you at the last.'

She still clasped her hands about his neck, and now, raising her face, she held out her lips to be kissed, with the supplicating gesture of a child, and then he put his lips to hers, and they met and parted for the first and last time.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE APPROACH.

IN the evening Madame Avenet—a warm-hearted, motherly woman, of Spanish birth—going up to see if Miss Vane would come downstairs and join the little party in the *salon*, found Folly sitting on the stairs opposite Margaret's door.

‘Mon Dieu! my little one, how you frightened me!’ she exclaimed in an undertone, taking notice of Folly’s raised finger. ‘What do you do here?’

‘I am taking care of his sister,’ Folly replied; ‘but she don’t like me; that’s why I sit outside here.’

‘Won’t you come downstairs, my little one? There’s Madame Potel, and Made-

moiselle Olympe, and Père Jacquette, all with the freshest news ; they say the troops are quartered in the Boulevard des Batignolles. I am about to ask Mademoiselle Margaret to descend.'

'If she goes down I will follow ; but say nothing of me to her, good mother. And if she won't go down, see if there is anything she wants, and let me know.'

'Eh, well !' murmured Madame Avenet, leaving her with a nod ; 'she has a mad head, this little actress, but her heart is good for all that.'

After an absence of some moments, Madame Avenet returned, and, closing the door behind her, said to Folly, in an undertone :

'You can do nothing, my child. Mademoiselle happily is fatigued, and she will go to bed quite soon.'

Folly nodded, without moving from the listless attitude in which she sat.

'And will not you come down and listen to the news of Mademoiselle Olympe ?'

Folly shook her head, and Madame Avenet, with a sigh, left her sitting with her chin in her hand.

'Mon Dieu ! It is a triste time for the old,

but for the young who love it is worse,' said the old lady, as she descended the *escalier*.

All night long Folly sat by the door, only changing her position when her limbs became cramped. When she heard Margaret moving about her room in the morning, she returned to her own apartment and threw herself upon her bed, but not to sleep. She was too strong to be hysterical, and her grief did not expend itself in violent paroxysms: it was a long-enduring, constant pain, which gave her no opportunity for forgetful sleep. Repose for her body was all she sought; she did not wish to sleep while he lived.

She ate the roll and drank the coffee brought her by the *garçon* mechanically; then she opened the *croisée* and went out upon the little terrace. A pattering sound reached her ear. She held her breath to listen with greater intentness. There could be no doubt about it—she had heard the sound before—it was musketry.

A weazen, bent old man came shuffling out of the Rue de Moscou on to the Carrefour; he looked up, and seeing Folly, raised his hat and hastened his steps across the place towards the hotel. It was Esperenza. Folly

ran downstairs and met him before he had ascended half-a-dozen steps.

‘Where is the fighting?’ she asked, panting for breath.

‘In the Parc Monceaux,’ answered Esperenza.

‘That is on the Boulevard des Batignolles.’

‘Yes; but the enemy has to pass the Collège Chaptal before they can bring a gun to bear upon the Place Clichy. Believe me, mademoiselle, they will not do that to-day. I have hastened to assure you of that. I will go now up to the barricades where our friend is, and I will bring you the first news.’

‘First of all go up and see his sister, and tell her what you have told me.’

Esperenza visited Margaret, and after staying with her some time, repeating his assurances that the Place Clichy would not be attacked that day, and prognosticating a repulse of the enemy by the force at the Collège Chaptal, he left her tolerably composed. Folly was waiting outside for him.

‘Tell him,’ she said in a low tone, to Esperenza, ‘tell him I am obedient, and return to me when there is any news to tell.’

Esperenza did not return until the evening.

He had found it difficult to communicate with Vane, who was working within the barricades, and, being admitted, he had been forced to give assistance in strengthening the work. He came to the hotel exhausted, and shaking with fatigue. Folly made him eat and drink and talk. He was made to describe all that he had seen and heard; there was but little that related to Vane, but those scraps she caught up eagerly and enlarged. Esperenza had given her message, and Vane had smiled and said, 'Good little soul!' when he heard it, and at parting he had taken the ring from his finger and told him to give it her with this message, 'We shall meet again.'

How the day had gone on the Boulevard des Batignolles, Esperenza could not tell. There were many conflicting rumours. Some said that the Communists still held the Parc, that they had certainly repulsed the regular troops, that many of the Versaillais had thrown down their arms and fled to the Federal ranks, while others declared that the Parc was cleared and the Collège Chaptal was so closely besieged that there was no escape for the Communists who had taken refuge in it unless a successful sortie could be made during the night.

This latter report seemed best supported. Several wounded Communists crossed the Carrefour, a few doggedly silent, the majority noisily calling upon the people to prepare for active defence. The excitement in the streets was intense. It was not until late in the evening that the sounds of fusillade ceased.

When Esperenza was refreshed, he went out to gather what news was to be had, and coming back confirmed the reports that the Communists had evacuated the Parc and taken refuge in the Collège Chaptal.

‘What will happen after that?’ asked Folly.

‘One cannot say, my dear child. They cannot attack the Place Clichy from this side until their rear is protected from attack, until the Collège is taken and the barricades on the Place de l’Europe silenced. They dare not attack the Place Clichy by the Boulevard des Batignolles alone, for three-quarters of a kilomètre they would be exposed to the mitrailleuses and guns of the barricade that crosses it from the Rue Bion to the Rue St. Petersbourg; there is no protection; the boulevard is perfectly straight from the Collège, and it is an ascent also.’

‘Tell me, then, how they will attack it?’

‘By the back streets leading from the Place de l’Europe; in that way alone they can avoid the fire from the barricades.’

‘Then they must pass here?’

‘Possibly.’

‘Can’t you be sure?’

Esperenza shrugged his shoulders.

‘I have been told so by a man who knows more of this affair than I do; and indeed his argument is plausible. Will you be good enough to observe, my child? I draw a triangle so’—he made the figure of a delta reversed. ‘This straight line along the top is the Boulevard des Batignolles; at this right-hand corner is the Place Clichy, with its seven strong barricades; at the left-hand corner is the Collège Chaptal, and the caserne adjoining at the bottom of the angle is the Place de l’Europe, the line on the left representing the Rue de Constantinople, the line on the right the Rue St. Petersbourg. Here inside the angle towards the right-hand corner is the Carrefour de l’Europe. Now, by coming through the bye-streets and through the Carrefour the enemy would get close to the barricades at the Place Clichy

without being exposed to the murderous artillery fire that would rake the Boulevard des Batignolles there, and the Rue St. Petersbourg here.'

'Yes, yes; then we should actually see the men pass here who were going to fire upon him.'

'That is probable, indeed, my child. I would willingly close my eyes to such a spectacle.'

Folly knitted her brow. Presently she said:

'Can you fire a gun?'

'Yes, my little one; but my hand is not steady, and my sight is short.'

'Well, you can at least load a gun,' Folly said, in an impatient tone.

'Yes, yes, truly,' Esperenza replied, nervously.

'It is easy enough—see!'

Folly rose, crossed quickly to a cupboard, and lifted out a chassepot from a pile of a dozen that stood there—weapons which her sisters of the ballet had paraded Paris with when there was less danger, but left unclaimed now. She brought out a box of cartridges, and showed Esperenza the method of charging the gun.

‘Yes, I understand all that,’ he said, executing the movements she had gone through. ‘I can load the gun well enough, but I cannot see a man distinctly at fifty paces.’

‘I can,’ answered Folly.



CHAPTER XXIV.

LE CARREFOUR DE L'EUROPE.



AT daybreak the following morning a furious attack was made by the Versaillais upon the Collége Chaptal; at the same time a strong detachment of troops, advancing by the Rue du Rocher, besieged the caserne at the corner of the Avenue Portalis. Both positions were taken by ten o'clock, after a desperate defence. It is said that not one Communist escaped death in either of these buildings; the apartments and their approaches were choked with the slain. From the caserne the successful troops made their way to the Gare de l'Ouest, from whence, after a brief but bloody struggle, the Federals were dislodged.

Following up these successes, the Ver-

saillais assailed the strong position taken by the Communists on the Place de l'Europe, attacking it simultaneously on three sides, by the Rue de Constantinople, the Rue de Vienne, and the Rue de Londres.

It was about eleven o'clock that the echoing boom of the first gun fired from the Place de l'Europe struck clear and distinct upon the ears of the anxious listeners in the Hôtel de Milan. Folly was walking impatiently up and down the corridor before Margaret's room. She stopped short, hearing the sound.

Esperenza came hurriedly from Folly's room at the end of the corridor, holding up his finger.

'Quick! Fetch Madame Avenet! Despatch!' said Folly. Then she tapped at Margaret's door.

There was no response, or it was lost in the repeated crash that came from the barricades. Without further ceremony Folly turned the handle and stepped quickly into the room. As suddenly she stopped short. Margaret, upon her knees by her bedside, was praying. She dared not approach the kneeling girl. She could only stand there wishing that she too could bend to God, and

implore His merciful protection for the one she loved.

‘Rub-rubble ! rub-rubble ! rub-rub-rub-rubble-rubble !’ sounded the guns, making the windows rattle in response. A faint moan rose from kneeling Margaret’s heart.

‘It is not the Clichy barricades that are attacked,’ said Folly, stepping towards her. ‘The guns are——’ she stopped, as Margaret, sliding sideways from the bed, fell heavily upon the floor. Folly threw herself upon the ground and, lifting Margaret’s body in her strong arms, laid the insensible head upon her bosom, and, like a mother with her child, covered the cold brow with kisses.

Madame Avenet bustled into the room with the quickness of one accustomed to giving help. She loosened Margaret’s collar, and then, assisted by Folly and Esperenza, she conveyed the unconscious girl into a room in the interior of the building and laid her on a bed.

‘Now leave her to me. Go away,’ she said to Folly and Esperenza. ‘She will soon recover, and then the fewer there are to interfere the better I shall succeed in calming her. I am a mother, and I know how to comfort the poor thing. You can go down

to the *salle*—it is quite safe there. The front of the house is dangerous, for we are forbidden to close the *persiennes*.'

Folly hesitated a moment.

'I have promised to guard her,' she said. 'You will not suffer anyone to come near her!'

'Of course I will not. I will stay with her for her sake and her brother's. There is no danger; the street-doors are locked and barred, and no one will be admitted. Go down to the *salle*.'

Folly withdrew, but she had no intention of retiring to the safety of the *salle*.

'Come along,' she whispered with feverish eagerness to Esperenza, when they were outside and the door was closed.

She ran swiftly along the corridors and into her room, opened the *croisée*, and stepped out upon the terrace.

The air was pungent with the reek of gunpowder. The light blue cloud of smoke rolled upwards over the houses and across the Carrefour. Above the incessant patterning of musketry there rose the occasional crash of a field-piece, and the tearing, rasping sound of the mitrailleuse.

A knot of men and women stood at the

corner of the Carrefour, craning their necks forward to peep down the Rue de St. Petersburg, from which there came occasionally a cloud of smoke, rolling sluggishly into the Carrefour and clinging to the moist pavement. People were shouting excitedly to one another from the windows. Some men were scrambling along the roofs with muskets in their hands, and taking up positions behind the chimneys.

Folly, looking up to the top window over the *boulangerie*, saw the little *couturière* with the pile of paving-stones at her right hand.

Esperenza, sniffing the saltpetre, and hearing the increasing volume of sounds, grew excited, and began to chatter in Spanish.

A fauteuil stood upon the terrace and formed a rest for the muzzles of the guns, whose butts rested upon the zinc, so that Folly, kneeling behind the evergreens, could lay her hand upon them.

‘You will stand behind me, there,’ said Folly to Esperenza, indicating the place he was to take; ‘and as I lay down a gun you must charge it and place it upon the fauteuil with the rest.’

‘Eh, eh, my brave girl!’ answered Espe-

renza. 'I will do my work. 'Ha! what's that?'

The sound of firing came from a new direction—a dozen or so of desultory musket-shots from the upper end of the Rue de Moscou, and then a disorganised crowd of men and women and children rushed into the Carrefour; the next instant a volley was fired, and five or six of the hindermost among the mob fell, one a woman. Folly dropped upon her knee by the shrubs, and taking up a gun, rested it upon the iron rail, pointed against the *débouchement* of the Rue de Moscou. The terrified crowd looked around at the closed doors in horror; some knocked furiously for admittance; others stood in the angles of the doorways, but the main body fled up the Rue Clapeyron.

The roar of guns still continued to rise from the Place de l'Europe. A bugle sounded in the Rue de Moscou, and presently a column entered the Carrefour at the double. They were greeted by a lively fusillade from house-tops and windows, and before they had half crossed the Carrefour Folly had laid down two guns to be recharged. It seemed as if the column intended to assail the barricades upon the Place de l'Europe from the Rue St.

Petersbourg, possibly unconscious that the street was commanded by the guns at the top of the street upon the Place Clichy, as well as by the barricade at the bottom upon the Place de l'Europe.

Stung by the shots fired upon them from all sides of the Carrefour, and anxious to escape from the exposure, the column advanced quickly until, suddenly coming upon that angle of the place which bisects the Rue de St. Petersbourg, they were stopped by the fire of the barricades at the top and bottom of the street. They recoiled and fled back to the Rue de Moscou, leaving a score of their number writhing upon the ground. A dozen lay upon the open space of the Carrefour, and their piercing cries, mingling with the exultant shouts of the excited Communists at the windows and on the housetops, added to the horrible discord which seemed now to rise from all sides.

Profiting by this sharp lesson, the attacking party renewed operations with greater caution. Advancing from the shelter of the Rue de Moscou they entered the Carrefour in single file, creeping with their backs to the shutters of the shops to avoid the fire from the windows above.

Their advance was along the only regular side of the triangular space formed by the Carrefour, and the one least exposed to the fire of the Communist occupants of the houses ; those which commanded the path stood at a considerable distance from it, and the fusillade was neither vigorous nor effective, except from one point—that point was the Hôtel de Milan ; a quick and deadly fire came from the little terrace over the third floor.

Nearly facing the corner of the hotel was a *charcuterie* with an iron shutter, which had been newly painted white, and against which the Versaillais, in their dark uniforms, stood out in bold relief. As they came before this shutter they fell, one after another, until no less than fourteen lay dead upon the pavement, and the shutter behind them was spattered and smeared with their blood.

Margaret, pale and motionless, sat by the side of Madame Avenet in the room looking on to the court in the centre of the hotel. The sharp crack of the rifles in the Carrefour, the louder, though more distant, roar from the Place de l'Europe, were all plain to hear ; the acrid smoke wafted down into the court, the glass upon the buffet jingled with

their vibration, yet she seemed to notice nothing ; it was as if the first crash of the guns had deprived her senses of their faculties ; even the yells of agony from the wounded in the Carrefour, which occasionally reached her ears, failed to rouse her from her apathy. A bullet shattered a chimney-pot, and a piece flying down struck the closed *persienne* of the window, and caused Madame Avenet to rise, with an exclamation of alarm, from her seat ; but Margaret never winced. It was not until there came a lull in the distant roar that she showed any animation.

‘ What does that mean ? ’ she asked. ‘ The big guns have ceased.’

Madame Avenet had not noticed the fact, being more occupied in listening to the closer musketry fire.

‘ It is so, indeed, my dear mademoiselle,’ she said, after a moment’s attention. ‘ We will hope that it is all over.’

‘ Then I may go and find my brother.’

‘ No, no ; that is impossible. If you will wait here I will go to the front windows and see if I can find out what has happened.’

‘ I will go with you,’ Margaret said ; and then, seeing Madame Avenet’s hesitation, she added, ‘ or by myself. I will know all.’

She refused Madame Avenet's support, and walked with firmness beside her through the passage and to the window in the side of the house looking upon the Rue de Turin. There was now no sound of conflict from the Place de l'Europe; the barricades were carried, and the fusillade between the victorious troops and the fugitive Communists there was lost in the sharper musketry fire kept up from the houses in the Carrefour and adjoining streets upon the troops now rapidly advancing from the Rue de Moscou, and crossing the open place to the Rue Clapeyron and the Rue de Turin, on their way to the Place de Clichy.

As the two women came to the window and looked down into the street, a team of horses, the foremost mounted by a driver with a bloody handkerchief bound round his head, tore out of the Carrefour, dragging a piece of artillery behind them. The soldiers, doubling along the street, made way rapidly for the gun to pass. A wounded Communist lay on the left-hand side of the road by the kennel. The driver, with a diabolical laugh, lashed his horses on the right, making them swerve to the left, so that, curving from the straight line, the heavy wheels of the gun

rolled on to the wounded man and ground through his body as if he had been a rat.

‘Thus with them all!’ shrieked the driver, turning in his saddle and clicking his whip gaily over his head.

Many of the advancing soldiers answered him in the same spirit, but their voices were drowned in the thunder of guns that at that moment opened fire from the barricades on the Place de Clichy.

‘Oh, this is too horrible! I cannot bear it!’ Margaret cried, covering her face with her hands.

‘I was a *sotte* to let you come with me, my poor mademoiselle. You are not strong enough to see such things, Madame Avenet answered, and she led the girl back, who had now no strength to resist, scarcely enough to support herself upon her trembling limbs. Once more she sat down to listen and wait until the fearful din should be ended. An hour—two hours—she sat there; she knew not how long; the moments were told by the echoing thud of the cannon, and they were too many to count.

Another waited and listened. Folly’s last cartridge was spent, and the useless rifles she had hurled down upon the marching troops,

and now, a door only dividing her from Margaret, she sat in the gloomy passage upon the floor, her hands clasped round her knees, and her chin resting upon them. Her bright skin was veiled with the murky stain of gunpowder ; nothing of her was visible in the gloom but her great flashing eyes, that seemed to focus and reflect all that there might be of light in the place. One coming from the other end of the passage would have fled in terror, thinking a panther had taken refuge and lay crouching there.

All that she could do for him she had done ; there was nothing for her now but to wait and wait, and think and think. With Richard Vane, her hero, in her mind, she could tolerate no other subject of reflection. Now that she could do nothing she wanted to be alone. She had sent Esperenza to search the house for more arms, and bidden him not return without some, and her only hope was that 'the women' wouldn't come to disturb her with their silly talk and noisy fears, and inquisitive condolence.

After an hour Esperenza came nervously down the passage, for he feared the girl as much as he admired her.

Obedient to the instructions he had re-

ceived, he spoke in a whisper when he came to her.

‘I can only find this—take care—two chambers are loaded.’

Folly, without altering her position, lifted her hand and took the revolver he had brought.

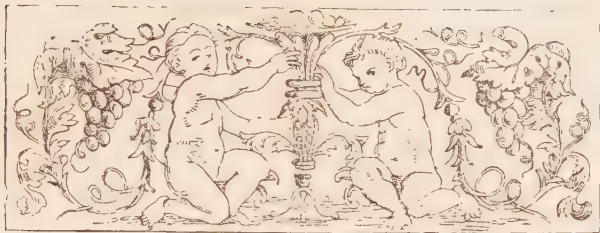
‘What use is this toy?’ she asked. ‘Go and find something better.’

‘I will try, but I fear I can find nothing. I only discovered that by accident. The firing is still heavy. I really believe that the barricades, where our friend is, will be found invincible, and if the Communists only rally and advance from the other quarters——’

‘Go and find me a gun!’ said Folly, impatiently.

Esperenza left her.

What did it matter to her whether the barricades held out or yielded, whether the ultimate victory was with Paris or Versailles? What did she want with firearms now? Nothing. She knew that the first who fell upon that fatal barricade was Richard Vane—knew it as surely as if she had been there by his side when, with the name of Progress on his lips, he fell forward, pierced through and through with rifle-bullets.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE DEAD.

THE conflict on the Place de Clichy was all over by five o'clock on the evening of the twenty-third. The barricades were silent, but for the awful and hideous cries of the wounded who lay upon them and among the scattered *débris*; but the streets around were still unsafe, and, until the light faded, there was a continual peppering of musketry about the conquered quarter, interspersed with an occasional volley. The work of reprisal had commenced. Many a wretched *blousier*, with no stronger evidence of crime against him than the mark of powder on his thumb, was set up against the wall and shot at half a dozen

paces. A systematic house-to-house search for Communists was reserved for the morrow.

It was about seven o'clock that a girl was seen wheeling a hand-barrow from the Place de Clichy, down the Rue de St. Petersbourg, threading her way through the obstacles in her path—the road was strewn with fragments of the barricade, with *persiennes* torn from the windows, with shattered lamps and dead bodies—heedless of the danger to which she exposed herself.

An officer, followed by a squad of men, came out from a house they had been searching, and caught sight of her.

‘Hold! What have you got there?’ cried the officer, stepping in front of the barrow.

‘A dead man.’

‘Who is it?’ asked the officer, turning back the sheet and looking upon the face of the unquestionably dead man laid upon the barrow.

‘Don’t you know him?—you should. It is Richard Vane, who brought food to you when you were starving. Get away, and let me pass.’

The officer did not move; he was looking suspiciously at the girl.

‘Get out of the way, I say. Let me pass!’

she cried fiercely, putting her hand in the folds of her dress. There was a 'toy,' with two loaded chambers, in her pocket.

'Where do you want to go?'

'The Hôtel de Milan.'

'I thought so,' said the officer, making a sign to a man who stood behind the girl. The man immediately caught hold of her right arm. The girl struggled violently to release herself.

A gentleman at this moment came from the house. He wore light trousers, a frock-coat, and carried a stick in his neatly-gloved hand. A thin ribbon tied in his button-hole was the only mark distinguishing him from a private individual.

'What is the matter?' he asked of the officer.

Making a salute, the officer stepped to his side, and said, in a low voice :

'If I am not mistaken, this is the woman who did us the mischief in the Carrefour de l'Europe this morning. She comes from the Hôtel de Milan, at the corner of the Rue de Turin there ; and, if you will look, monsieur, you shall find that her collar is black on the right-hand side. She has the body of a dead Communist on the barrow there.'

‘You have done your duty, *caporal*. I will see to the rest ; leave her to me,’ said the gentleman. Then, as the *caporal* retired, he turned to the girl, and said : ‘ You can go on.’

He walked upon the pavement, keeping a little in the rear of the girl, who struggled along the road with her heavy burden, and her thoughts engaged upon her task. She had hardly looked at the man who probably had saved her from summary execution ; she valued her life at too little to be grateful for the service. She saw nothing in the future beyond taking this dead dear one away and providing his body a decent resting-place, and so she plodded on, unconscious of fatigue or peril. Once a gust of wind, sweeping through the street, caught up the sheet and blew it back, exposing the calm waxen face of him she was taking away. She stopped, and going to the side of her barrow, she looked for one moment upon the fixed features with ineffable sadness, and then tenderly covered it with the cloth as a mother might protect her sleeping child.

The gentleman upon the pavement caught sight of Richard Vane’s face, and his supposition was confirmed. He seemed well known

by the men who were scouring the streets for Communists. A step forward and a peculiar movement of the stick he carried, accepted as a signal, twice or thrice saved the girl from molestation on her way to the Carrefour. When she came to the Hôtel de Milan, Madame Avenet, watching from a window above, made a sign that she would come down and open the door.

The gentleman, coming to her side as she stood by the barrow, said in a low tone :

‘Folly, I have permitted you to bring home that body because I was a friend of Richard Vane’s, and now I will give you some advice for yourself; remove the traces of gunpowder from your face and hands, or they may cost you your life, despite my good wishes for your safety.’

Folly looked up at him with the dreamy unconsciousness of one disturbed from a heavy slumber, and, without answering him, turned to Monsieur Avenet, and beckoned him to assist in carrying up the body.

‘Then you have found him, my child,’ said Esperenza, when she had come into the passage, where she had bidden him stay and watch over Margaret in her absence. ‘Does he still live?’

‘Live!’ answered Folly, with harsh contempt. ‘Haven’t the barricades been silenced these two hours?’

They carried their burden into the vestibule of the hotel, then Folly asked :

‘Where is his sister?’

‘She is still in the back-room,’ Madame Avenet replied ; ‘but you will not let her see him to-night. The poor soul has composed herself a little. She will have strength to look upon this dreadful sight in the morning.’

‘That is true—that is quite true,’ said Folly, eagerly. ‘Carry him to my room, and let him rest there until the morning.’

So they carried the dead man, with gentle hands, and laid him on Folly’s bed. And when she was left alone with him she fastened the door and turned to her lifeless love with a strange exultant joy in her heart. There was nothing ‘dreadful’ in his appearance to her. Death could inspire her with no terror. She knelt down softly by the bed, and laying her cheek upon the pillow by his head, pressed her lips to his cold brow and wept.



CHAPTER XXVI.

MARGARET'S PERIL.



MONSIEUR AVENET, descending to the ground-floor to see to his door, found the gentleman who had accompanied Folly sitting patiently in the vestibule. Rising, he said :

‘Monsieur Avenet, I wish to speak a word with you privately.’

‘M. Avenet led the way into the *salon*, and closed the door.

‘My name is Garnier,’ said the gentleman. ‘I am of the secret police, and a servant of the Assembly. Your hotel has been made conspicuous to-day by a fusillade from the end abutting on the Carrefour.’

‘I have lately discovered the fact ; but I

assure you I knew nothing of it at the time ! M. Avenet protested, in great trepidation.

‘That, unfortunately, does not alter the fact. You have just admitted into the house the body of a notorious Communist, who, to my knowledge, has been under your roof since February.’

‘My dear monsieur—how could I help it ? We have been in the hands of the Commune. I was yesterday forced to assist in building a barricade, though my own son is in the army of Versailles.’

‘The fact remains, and an ugly fact it is too. Now the fusillade was kept up by a woman, and suspicion points directly against the sister of the man who fought and died to-day in the defence of the Commune.’

‘But, my dear monsieur, I declare it was not she.’

‘You increase your own responsibility by averting it from another. Listen to me, and be silent if you are wise. I say suspicion rests upon Miss Vane ; and whether she is or is not guilty will matter little in the strong presumptive evidence against her. The victorious troops are not merciful, and your defence may simply be taken as a sign of complicity which will imperil your life. I,

myself—I admit in confidence to you—am inclined to believe her innocent, having known her formerly in England ; and therefore, for her sake and for yours, I wish to remove her from this hotel before the search is made to-morrow morning.'

Monsieur Avenet began to pour out words of gratitude, but Amadis Garnier checked him.

'There is no time to be lost,' he said. 'Go and fetch Miss Vane, or ask if she will permit me to see her in her own apartment, and I will induce her to accept my assistance.'

M. Avenet hastily quitted the *salon*, in about five minutes he returned, opened the door for Margaret, and immediately closed it behind her. Amadis Garnier, standing at the farther end of the room examining a photograph, appeared to be unconscious that she had entered the room until the door closed ; then he turned and came towards her with an exclamation of pleasure and his hand extended. She shrank away a little, and rested her hand upon a chair.

'My brother told me of his interview with you, and all that transpired then,' she said ; 'so it will not surprise you that I am unable to meet you, or to think of you in the old

spirit, Mr. Garnier. Indeed, I should have declined to see you at all but for the pressing earnestness of M. Avenet.'

'First let me beg you to be seated,' said Garnier, placing a chair for Margaret, which weakness compelled her to accept. Standing before her, he continued, 'I have not come to you in this terrible hour from a merely selfish motive. I would not have intruded on you now even to regain my place in your esteem. With respect to that, I will merely say that I am now what I have always been—a servant of the police. Employed in secret service, you cannot blame me for being secret.'

'It is not that for which my brother and I despised you; it was for deserting the side which you believed to be right for unworthy motives.'

'I have never deserted that side. I am still an Imperialist.'

'I understood that you held an office under the Commune.'

'That is true; but I was serving its foes.'

'Then you were a spy.'

'I was a servant of the secret police. The end, in my opinion, justified the means. I acted consistently with the principles I

profess. But that is nothing. My object is not to defend myself but to protect you. Your life is in danger. As the sister of a prominent leader in the Commune you will be exposed to the vindictive animosity of its enemies. Suspicion already rests upon you, and the judgment of the military will be sharp and severe. Pressing necessity compels me to break the sad news to you that your brother is no more.' Madge closed her eyes and bent her head. 'You stand alone and friendless. Will you accept my help?'

'No,' said Margaret, raising her head and speaking with firm emphasis.

'You speak under the influence of feelings which I can well understand, and which increase my respect for you. I do not ask you to accept at once a proposal which must be at the present moment repugnant to you. I will call upon you for an answer at six o'clock to-morrow morning. By that time I shall have made all necessary arrangements for your safety and escape from Paris. I impose no conditions; I will risk my life to save you, in the hope that when you reach England you will give that favourable answer to my former offer of marriage which I believe you intended to make. In leaving you I only

beg you to consider the consequences of refusal.' He walked towards the door, stopped, and returning a step, said : ' I am afraid that my communication must seem harsh to you ; but you must attribute that to my desire to place the serious conditions of the situation in a clear and distinct light before you, without inducing you by any emotional display to act in opposition to reason. But, believe me, my feelings towards you are more sympathetic and tender now, that you are alone and unfriended, than ever they were in your happier moments. And you will understand, my dear Miss Vane, that in providing escape for you, and in quitting Paris at this time myself, I sever myself for ever from that service which is so odious to you. I beg you to consider these facts, and give me the benefit of impartial judgment.'

He withdrew, and Margaret remained sitting in the *salon*, with her head bent and her hands crossed in her lap, powerless to move, and careless of what happened to herself now that her fears were confirmed, her brother dead, and nothing left to hope for.



CHAPTER XXVII.

FOLLY'S EXPIATION.

ABOUT five o'clock on the following morning Señor Esperenza tapped at the door of Folly's room. There was no response. He tapped again, louder. The door opened, and Folly, coming from the room and closing the door softly behind her, said :

‘ What do you want, my father ?’

She spoke in the soft, amiable tone of voice which had been natural to her during the previous months, and without a trace of the harsh impatience she had shown towards her old friend during the last few days of agitation and anxiety. The sweeter accent agreed with the expression of her face, which, as she

stood in the soft morning light that streamed through an eastern window upon her, seemed, to the old man's eyes, more tenderly beautiful than anything he had ever seen.

‘My child,’ he said, ‘I am happy to see you so composed.’

‘Yes,’ she answered; ‘we are at rest now. The anxiety and the partings—they are all over.’

‘I am troubled to have to break in upon your peace; but you bade me come to you if anything happened to Miss Vane.’

‘What has happened?’

‘She is in danger. It is thought that she did the execution which came from your hand yesterday.’

‘Poor soul! She had not the strength to lift a gun.’

‘That is nothing. The men who will judge her are mad with the thirst of blood, and will think it sufficient evidence that she was the sister of Richard Vane.’

‘Where is she?’

‘In her room below. Madame Avenet and I have been sitting with her. We have done our best to console her; but, though she is grateful for our sympathy, we cannot make her take interest in life. All that we can

suggest of hope falls upon her heart just like the rain upon a flower that is dead.'

'Does she know that *he* lies in there?'

'No. We purposely refrained from telling her; for a means of escape from Paris has been offered which she would not accept if she knew that she must leave her brother here.'

'How can she escape?'

'Through an officer of the police, who was once her brother's friend. He has warned her of her danger, and offered to provide for her escape.'

'Do you know the man?'

'It is he who protected you last night.'

'Did anyone protect me? I forget. What is his name?'

'Garnier—Monsieur Amadis Garnier—as we learn from Miss Vane.'

'Amadis Garnier!' Folly said, with more excitement in her voice. 'Oh, I am a careless friend—selfish and thoughtless to the last! I promised him I would protect her—and I permit her to be exposed to the very man he warned me against! Has she accepted his offer?'

'No. She declines to go; and for that reason I came to you, thinking you might

add your voice to ours in persuading her. A guard is already placed before the house to prevent anyone leaving it, and in an hour M. Garnier will come for a final answer.'

Folly nodded her satisfaction; then for a minute she stood looking out at the streaked sky in silent thought. Esperenza noticed that she had changed the dress she wore the day before for a lighter and prettier one, and that her hair was dressed neatly. Her appearance altogether was opposed to his expectations; but Folly, from the first hour he saw her, had continually been a source of surprises to him.

Turning her eyes suddenly upon Esperenza, she said:

'When that man comes, let me know. I will save his sister.'

'My child, I must warn you to be careful. The suspicion may fall upon you.'

'Do you think that makes any difference to me?'

'No, no,' said the old ballet-master; 'but still I fear. And yet, now that you have washed the traces away from your face, and look so young and beautiful, no one could think that it was you who stood upon that terrace yesterday. Nevertheless, I cannot help fearing for you. I am quite an old

friend, and a faithful friend, as you know. Will you not confide in me, and tell me how you will save Miss Vane ?

‘ You are an old friend, and a good friend,’ said Folly, drawing closer to him and taking his hand. ‘ I have forgotten all your kindness in my late troubles, perhaps. I have not noticed them, so much has my mind been devoted to one other friend ; but I think of them now, and love you for your faithfulness. Never mind how I shall save his sister ; it is enough that I will. Do not ask me any questions. As you love me, help me to do my duty.’

He looked at her timidly, with a presentiment of her intention. Again in rapt thought, she was looking through the window at the pearly morning clouds in perfect composure. He looked at her until the tears blurred his sight, and his trembling fingers fell away from her hand.

After a few moments’ silence, Folly said :

‘ I have still a favour to beg of you. When I have made arrangements with M. Garnier, and have provided for Miss Vane’s safety, I want you to take her to England, and not leave her until she is there. Will you do that ?’

Esperenza bowed his head in silence.

‘And while you are there I wish you to find my husband, Roland Aveling, and return him this ring that he gave me, and tell him that I have done all that I could to atone for the past.’

She took off the wedding-ring from her third finger and held it out. Esperenza took it from her without lifting his head.

‘That is all. And now, my father, kiss me and leave me here until I am wanted.’

* * * * *

At six o'clock M. Garnier walked into the Hôtel de Milan, and requested the *concierge* to send his card to Miss Vane. The messenger returned, after a brief delay, with a note, in which Margaret informed M. Garnier that she had not altered her decision of the previous evening, and declined to see him. M. Garnier wrote a reply in the bureau, and despatched it by the messenger. The words he wrote were these :

‘If you persist in refusing my offer, I have but one alternative—I must arrest you as a suspected Communist.’

In a little while Señor Esperenza descended the stairs, holding by the baluster-rail for support. His lips and cheeks were ashy pale,

and when he spoke his voice was scarcely raised above a whisper.

‘Monsieur Amadis Garnier?’ he said inquiringly to the gentleman confronting him.

‘That is my name.’

‘You have said that, unless Miss Vane accepts your protection, it will be your duty to arrest her.’

Garnier looked round, with furtive anxiety, to see if this speech were overheard, and seeing no one, replied quickly in the affirmative.

‘Then,’ replied Esperenza, still holding the stair-rail and speaking with effort, ‘I am requested to tell you to do your duty.’

Amadis Garnier stood for a minute irresolute, tapping the polished toe of his boot with his cane.

‘Is that Miss Vane’s definite answer? Is she aware of the fatal consequences?’ he asked.

‘It is her answer. She understands her position. The most urgent persuasion of her friends has failed to make her waver for one moment in her determination.’

‘Ah, well!’ Garnier exclaimed, with a little gesture of impatience, and then he walked quickly from the hotel.

Esperenza waited at the stair-foot, with his head bent and his chest heaving like an invalid exhausted by exertion, until he heard the tramp of feet, a peremptory word of command, and the rattle of arms in the *porte cochère* outside; then he straightened his body, as if collecting strength for greater effort.

Garnier, with an officer and four men, entered the vestibule.

‘Follow me, gentlemen,’ said Esperenza.

He led the way to the fourth stage, and then pointing down the passage, said:

‘That is the room—No. 13.’

The officer spoke to his men, and they advanced along the passage, their heavy tread echoing through the hotel. Esperenza sat down upon the stairs, and, burying his face in his hands, rocked himself backwards and forwards, moaning, ‘My poor child!—my little dancer!—my dear child!’

As the soldiers came to a halt before the room marked 13, the door opened wide, and Folly stood before them.

‘You have come for the woman who shot your comrades on the Carrefour yesterday?’ she said.

‘We have come to arrest the sister of the Communist, Richard Vane,’ Garnier an-

swered, and then, with a rapid movement, he slipped past the girl, and entered the room, where he expected to find Margaret.

Folly sprang back into the room, and placed herself between Garnier and her bed, which was covered with a spotless quilt. The officer and his men followed quickly.

‘You shall not lay a finger on this bed,’ she cried. ‘It is your duty to arrest the woman who fought yesterday for the Commune. I am she.’

The officer looked to the agent of police for instruction.

‘It is the sister of Richard Vane who is suspected,’ Garnier said.

‘What does that matter?’ cried Folly. ‘I tell you it was I who did it. His sister was too ill to rise from her chair. Richard Vane was ten thousand times dearer to me than a brother. See, it is I who have his body—not his sister.’ As she spoke she drew back the coverlet to show the body of the man she loved. She had surrounded it with sprigs from the evergreens upon the terrace, and laid all the trifles which she cherished beside him. She bent a fond look upon him for a moment, and then, turning round and addressing the officer, said :

‘Is it enough? This is my room. Look at the window, there, all clouded with smoke from my gun. Will you take this evidence, or arrest an innocent girl upon the imputation against her of a man who wishes to ruin her? Do you want more evidence? Look in the *panier*, in the corner you will find the dress I wore yesterday, with the collar and cuffs all black with powder. Look at this hand’—she stretched out her right hand—‘black still with the powder—traces that the treacherous man there saw last night, and for his own purposes bade me wash away if I wished to be safe. Are these proofs enough? I ask.’

As she spoke she dropped her right hand and slipped it back into the folds of her skirt.

‘Perhaps you can volunteer another proof,’ said Garnier, with a short laugh.

‘Yes, one—and one only,’ answered Folly, looking straight at him. ‘One last act shall prove that I hate the enemies of the good.’

She drew from her pocket the revolver Esperenza had given her, put it against Garnier’s breast, and fired the two charged chambers. The next instant she flung herself upon the bed, and twined her arms closely around the neck of her dead friend.

The officer looked at the dead police agent

upon the floor, and then at the desperate girl lying with her back towards him. It was a case for summary retribution. He signalled to his men. They raised their guns, took aim, and fired.

A cry of joy mingled with the echoing report of the chassepots, as Folly's soul fled through her lips, and there came an end to her troubled life.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAST.

‘**R**OLEY, my boy, you shall show me how you intend draining that bit of land down by Mayford : I was thinking over it last night, and I can’t see how you will get your fall with that confounded brook running across it.’

‘I shall take the pipes down Chishelm below the bridge ; I will show you.’ Roland pulled out his pocket-book and pencil.

‘If you are not too fatigued with the day’s exertions, we’ll go down there. I cannot abide diagrams.’

‘With pleasure, sir. Will you have your cob ?’

‘No ; I can walk there ; ’tis not a couple of miles, and the exercise will do you good,

my boy. You're in the saddle too much. The blood is apt to get congested, and one grows lumpy and dull in consequence ; I've found it myself.'

'Let us walk, then, sir.' Roland sauntered from the dining-room into the hall, and took down his hat ; Sir Andrew, following, regarded his son with anxiety.

'Perhaps, after all,' he said, 'we might have the nags. You look tired, Roley.'

'I prefer walking ; I'm not at all tired,' Roland answered, turning with a smile, and affectionately linking his arm in that of the solicitous old baronet. As they walked down the steps to the avenue, he continued : 'You must not be anxious about my health, sir ; I am perfectly well. I am naturally concerned for our friends in Paris. Postal communication is open, but I have received no news from Dick.'

'No news, my boy, is generally good news.'

Roland shook his head.

'You have seen the evening paper ?' he asked.

'Yes ; you refer to the batch of prisoners executed yesterday at Paris. That need not make you fear for Vane. The judges will

discriminate between men who acted upon conscientious convictions, as he did, and the thoughtless rabble, who simply used the opportunity to indulge their brutal passions.'

'That does not seem to be the case, unfortunately,' answered Roland.

'I pray Heaven he may escape!' said the baronet, fervently.

Roland did not reply.

'In the absence of news, one always fears the worst,' said Sir Andrew; and again receiving no response, his voice dropped to a tone of supplication, as he asked, 'You do not think I am responsible for all, Roley, do you?'

'You, dad! What could have put such a notion into your head?'

'My own conscience, I fear, my boy. I know I have much to answer for. I cannot get poor Margaret out of my thoughts, though I have said nothing to you on the subject. I watch the post as eagerly as you. I could not sleep last night for thinking of what her fate would be if anything happened to poor Vane. Think of her in that distracted city, alone and bereaved. But why should I tell you to think of her?—cannot I see, every minute of the day, that your heart and brain

are restless with anxiety and care? It has taken me seventy years, Roley, to learn my lesson.'

'You have done as you thought was wise.'

'That does not reconcile me to my folly. I might have had a happy son and a happy daughter by my side now; but instead I have robbed my boy of happiness and plunged a sweet girl into trouble.'

'Say no more, dad,' said Roland.

He knew that his father suffered; he rejoiced that his selfishness had given way before a generous sorrow, but he did not like to hear him confessing his errors.

'I am thinking, sir, that we will put an end to our anxiety, and see if we can be of use at the same time.'

'With all my heart, if it may be done.'

'We will wait until the post comes in to-morrow, and then, if we have no news from Dick, we will go and seek him in Paris.'

'We will, my boy. Now, why didn't I think of it myself? God bless me--what an old fool I am!'

With the necessity of making arrangements for a possible departure, the two gentlemen shortened their expedition over the Mayford marsh lands, and returned to the Hall as the

clock was chiming the half-hour after eight. The butler, opening the door, announced that a gentleman was waiting to see Mr. Aveling. Sir Andrew walked to the library, while Roland entered the room in which the visitor waited.

The visitor was Señor Esperenza.

Sir Andrew sat in his chair by the window looking out upon the landscape. The light faded and faded over the purple hills until only a faint primrose tint remained of the glowing glory left by the sun ; the evening star came out, and after it other tiny points of silvery light, and yet Roland remained with his visitor. A faint presentiment crossed the baronet's mind that news had come from France, and he waited with growing anxiety for his coming. At length he heard his son's footsteps crossing the pavement of the hall with foreboding slowness ; he rose to his feet as the door opened, and Roland entered with his eyes downcast. Without a word—without raising his head—he walked across the room.

‘ My boy ! ’ said Sir Andrew, gently.

Roland looked at his father, his chin twitching convulsively, and then, with an effort, he said :

‘ Dick’s dead, sir.’

* * * *

‘ Dear old Dick ! Good, sweet old Dick, with his gentle eyes and loving smile—gone—gone for ever !’ Roland murmured, with a sigh that shook his whole frame, when the passionate tears that had followed his brief announcement of the news had been shed. We shan’t hear his cheery laugh and pleasant, soft, deep voice again, sir. Dear old Dick !’

‘ Poor fellow !’

‘ He thought of us at the last. Here is a note he wrote before leaving home for the barricades.’

He passed a paper that he had held in his hand. It was moist and warm with the young fellow’s tears. Sir Andrew took the paper tenderly and read it.

This was the note ;

‘ MY DEAR ROLEY,

‘ You will find among my books at Spitalfields one or two books on domestic architecture, which will, I think, be of interest to you in your present undertaking. Accept them, with all the affectionate wishes for your success and happiness. You will find

also the Shenstone which your father coveted; give it to him with a kindly word of adieu from me. And so, dear lad, farewell.

‘DICK.’

‘You see, sir,’ said Roland, taking back the letter, while Sir Andrew slipped the glasses from his eyes to wipe away a tear, ‘to the very last it was always of others he thought, not of himself. There’s not a word about his own feelings.’

Sir Andrew nodded in silence. Presently he said :

‘And his sister—what has become of her?’

‘She has returned to London—arrived this morning—and is now in Spitalfields.’

‘We will go to her, Roland—go to her at once—and do all that we can to make her happy. Is she alone?’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you heard of—of your wife?’

‘She, too, is shot. She died that Margaret might live.’

‘Great God! such heroism shames us of our meaner lives!’

* * * *

Scarcely a bullet-mark remains to tell of the fearful struggle which saved France from

a third Empire. Of the heroes who fought for her at that time, France honours only the living—the dead she scarcely remembers. They are forgotten, save by the personal friends who loved them for their good and earnest lives.

In the spring of this year a little party of English entered the cemetery of Père la Chaise, preceded by a wrinkled old Spaniard in a fur coat. A lady walked between her husband and his father, leaning upon their arms for support. She was not ill—not even delicate; on the contrary, she appeared to be the type of contented English mothers—a sweet and comely woman; but she was agitated with the memory of past sorrows and weak from emotion. Behind them walked an English maid-servant, leading two boys by the hand.

The old Spaniard walked slowly down the wide path, with his hat in his hand and his eyes upon the ground. Without raising his head, he turned down a narrow side-way, as if his feet had learnt the route by custom. He stopped by a single mound on which were placed two crosses. The gentlemen following him removed their hats as they approached; the

lady in silence sank upon her knees, and pressed her cheek and lips against the iron, while the tears flowed down her cheeks.

Presently she raised her head and beckoned to the two boys, who, in imitation of their father, had taken off their sailor-hats, and were standing a little apart, awed by their mother's grief. They came up to the grave, and the mother, circling them with her arms, said, between her sobs :

‘ Uncle Richard lies here, my darlings.’

* * * * *

There was a *pierre* at the foot of the grave, bung with a hundred trifles, such as the French offer upon graves ; it was a queer collection of fresh and rotting bagatelles, but the strangest among them was a fool's bauble, with a stick tied upon it to form a cross, and it stood over the simple word, inscribed upon the *pierre* :

‘ FOLLY.’

THE END.

